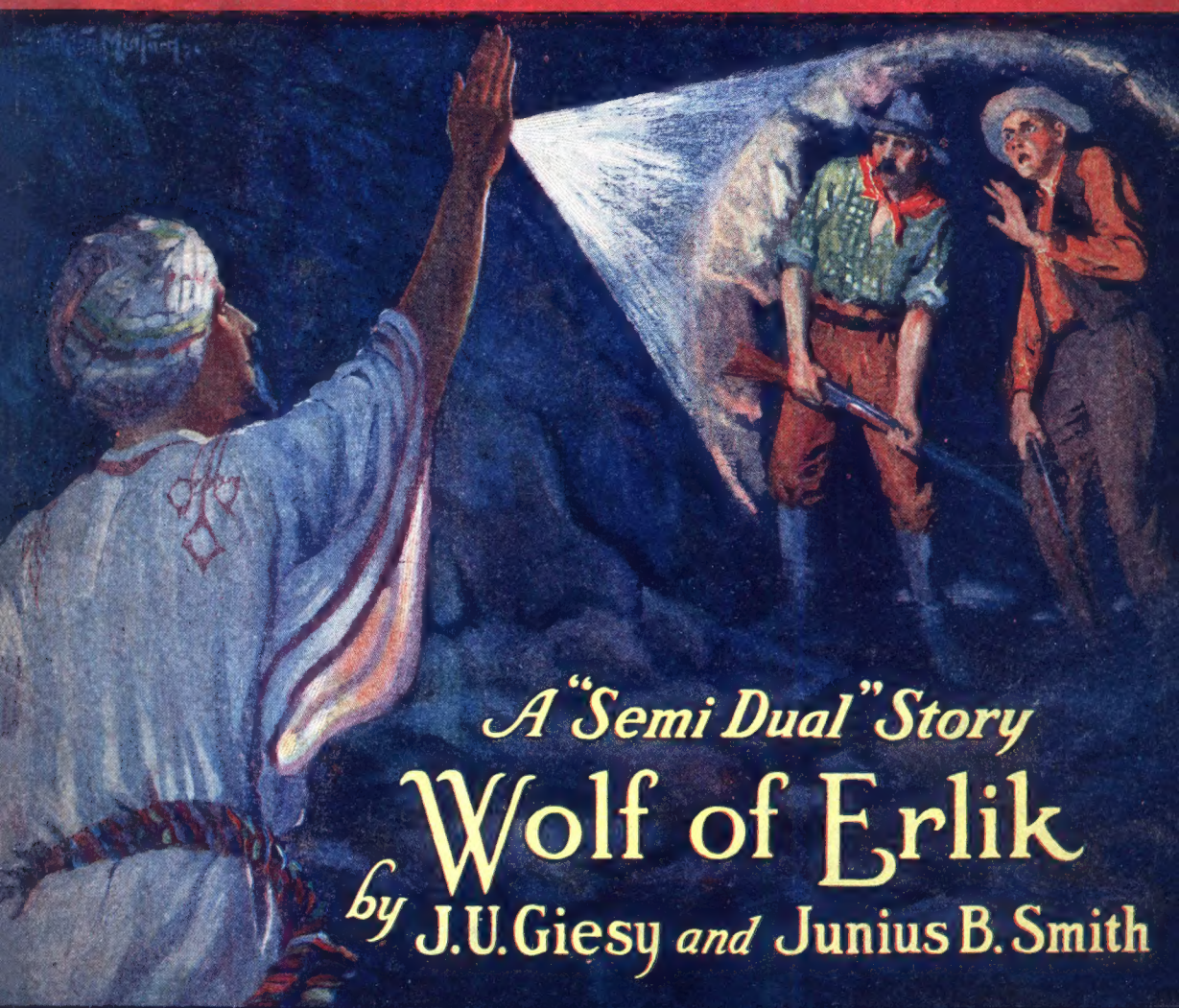
# ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



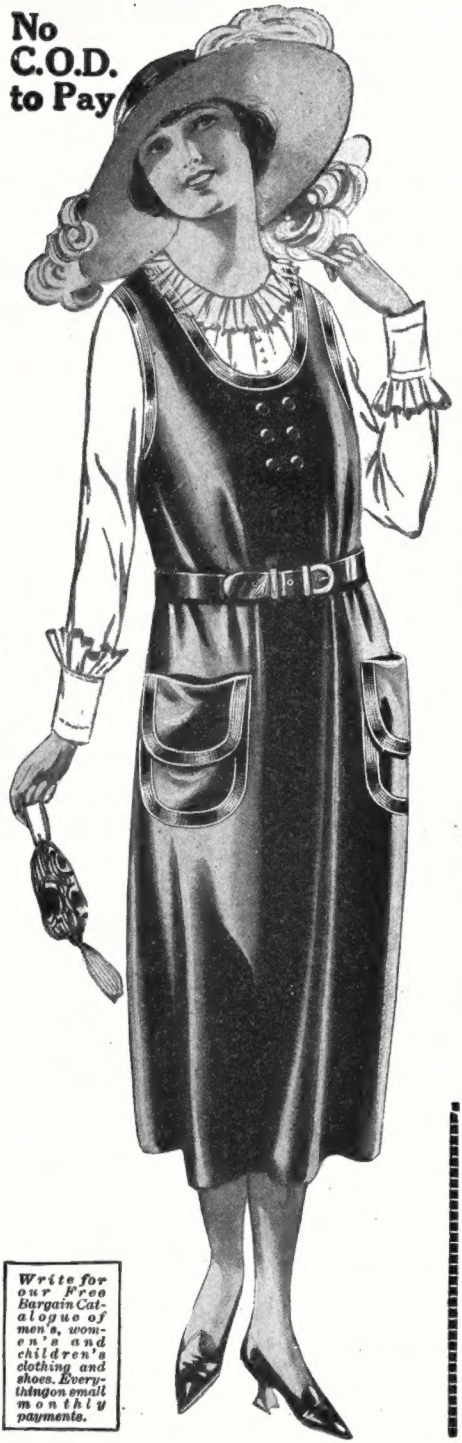
*A "Semi Dual" Story*

## Wolf of Erlik

*by* J. U. Giesy *and* Junius B. Smith

10¢ PER COPY — OCTOBER 22 — BY THE YEAR $4.00

**No C.O.D. to Pay**



*Write for our Free Bargain Catalogue of men's, women's and children's clothing and shoes. Everything on small monthly payments.*

# Only $1.00 DOWN Brings Your Choice of Velvet or All-Wool Serge Slipover Dress

Here is the season's smartest model, a beautiful slipover dress in fine quality velvet or all-wool serge, sent for only one dollar down. Money back if you ask for it. Don't miss this splendid bargain. Send the coupon NOW!

## Popular Sport Model

Two deep jaunty-looking pockets and a smart leather belt give this dress the look of sports wear so popular today for all ages. Fine materials and splendid workmanship make it suitable for dressy wear. Armholes, neck, and pockets are bound with fine silk braid. Big buttons trim the front. We illustrate this practical becoming model with waist to show you how it looks, but we do not furnish a waist with the dress. Any waist you have will look well with it. Furnished in sizes, 34 to 44; misses 16 to 20. Lengths, 33 to 39. Colors: All-wool serge—navy blue only; velvet—navy blue, black or brown.

**VELVET SLIPOVER.** Order by **No. 2F-39.**
Terms, **$1.00** with coupon, **$2.00** monthly.
No C. O. D. charges. Total price, **$8.98.**

**ALL-WOOL SERGE.** Order by **No. 2F-38.**
Terms, **$1.00** with coupon, **$2.00** monthly.
No C. O. D. charges. Total price, **$5.98.**

# Easy Payments

You may get this beautiful dress and pay in small monthly payments without a penny's extra cost. No charge for credit. We make one price to all. There is no more reason why you should pay cash in full for your clothes than there is reason for paying your rent a year in advance. Buy the Elmer Richards way as thousands are doing. Dress well and pay in small monthly sums.

# Send Coupon

This stunning dress sent ***on approval.*** If you don't keep it, you are not out one penny. No C. O. D. charges to pay. Send the coupon with $1.00 P. O. order or a dollar bill.

## Elmer Richards Co.

**Dept. 9277 West 35th Street, Chicago, Illinois**

I enclose $1.00. Send special bargain slipover dress checked below. If I am not satisfied, I can return it and get my money back. Otherwise, I will pay the monthly terms until the special bargain price has been paid

☐ **Velvet Slipover, navy blue black or brown, No. 2F-39** Bust.....Length.....Color.....
Terms, $1.00 with the coupon, $2.00 monthly. Total $8.98.

☐ **All-Wool Serge Slipover** Navy blue only. No. 2F-38 Bust.....Length.....
Terms, $1.00 with the coupon, $2.00 monthly. Total $5.98.

*Name*.....

*Address*.....

.....*State*.....

# Look!

21 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels—
Adjusted to the second—
Adjusted to temperature—
Adjusted to isochronism—
Adjusted to positions—
25-year gold strata case—
Montgomery Railroad Dial—
New Ideas in Thin Cases.

## Only $5.00 a Month

And all of this for $5.00 per month—a great reduction in watch prices direct to you—a 21-jewel adjusted watch at a rock-bottom price. Think of the high grade, guaranteed watch we offer here at such a remarkable price. And, if you wish, you may pay this price at the rate of $5.00 a month. Indeed, the days of exorbitant watch prices have passed.

**See It First** You don't pay a cent to anybody until you see the watch. You don't buy a Burlington Watch without seeing it. Look at the splendid beauty of the watch itself. Thin model, handsomely shaped—aristocratic in every line. Then look at the works! There you will see the masterpiece of the watch maker's skill. A perfect time-piece adjusted to positions, temperature and isochronism.

Practically every vessel in the U. S. Navy has many Burlington watches aboard. Some have over 100 Burlingtons. The victory of the Burlington among the men in the U. S. Navy is testimony to Burlington superiority.

# Send Your Name on This Free Coupon

Get the Burlington Watch Book by sending this coupon now. You will know a lot more about watch buying when you read it. You will be able to "steer clear" of the over-priced watches which are no better. Send the coupon today for the watch book and our offer.

**Burlington Watch Co.**
**19th St. and Marshall Blvd., Dept. 1457 – Chicago, Ill.**
**Canadian Office: 62 Albert Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba**

**Burlington Watch Co.**
**19th St. and Marshall Blvd.**
**Dept. 1457 Chicago, Ill.**

Please send me (without obligation and prepaid) your free book on watches with full explanation of your cash or $5.00 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

*Name*.....

*Address*.....

# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXVII CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 22, 1921 NUMBER 6

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## *NEXT WEEK'S PROGRAM*

"THE SUPER-SWING." By David Fox, author of "The Man Who Convicted Himself."
*A thrilling mystery serial of crime detection by The Shadowers, Inc.*

"POLLY PLAYS POLITICS." By Howard Rockey.
*A unique sidelight on practical statecraft.*

"A DOG MORE OR LESS." By William Merriam Rouse.
*A great adventure short story.*

"CANNODDLING." By Douglas Grahame.
*An amusing light romance.*

"THEIR BOSS." By Garret Smith.
*A clever business yarn.*

"BACK TO MAIN STREET." By Lyon Mearson.
*A tale of vaudeville folk.*

And other short stories and serials of the usual Argosy-All'sto y excellence.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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# Free Proof That I Can Raise Your Pay

**No matter how much you are earning now, I can show you how to increase it. I have even taken failures and shown them how to make, each week, $100, $200, and in many cases even more. I am willing to prove this entirely at my risk and expense.**

LET'S have a little chat about getting ahead—you and I. My name is Pelton. Lots of people call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it. I've done it for thousands of people—lifted them up from poverty to riches.

I'm no genius—far from it. I'm just a plain, everyday, unassuming sort of man. I've looked black despair in the eye—had failure stalk me around and hoodoo everything I did.

But today all is different. I have money and all of the things that money will buy. I am rich also in the things that money won't buy—health, happiness and friendship.

It was a simple thing that jumped me up from poverty to riches. As I've said, I'm no genius. But I had the good fortune to know a genius. One day this man told me a "secret." He said that every wealthy man knew this "secret,"—that is why he was rich.

I used the "secret." It surely had a good test. At that time I was flat broke. I had about given up hope when I put the "secret" to work. At first I couldn't believe my sudden change in fortune. Money actually flowed in on me. Things I couldn't do before became easy for me. My business boomed ahead. Prosperity became my partner. Since that day I've never known what it is to want for money, friendship, happiness, health or any of the good things of life. That "secret" surely made me rich in every sense of the word.

My sudden rise to riches naturally surprised others. People asked me how I did it. I told them. And it worked for them as well as it did for me.

Some of the things this "secret" has done for people are astounding. I would hardly believe them if I hadn't seen them with my own eyes. Adding ten, twenty, thirty or forty dollars a week to a man's income is a mere nothing. That's merely playing at it. Listen to this:

A young man in the East had an article for which there was a nation-wide demand. For twelve years he "puttered around" with it, barely eking out a living. Today this young man is worth $200,000. He has built a $25,000 home—and paid cash for it. He has three automobiles. His children go to private schools. He goes hunting, fishing, traveling whenever the mood strikes him. His income is over a thousand dollars a week.

I could tell you hundreds of similar instances. But there's no need to do this, as I'm willing to tell you the "secret" itself. Then you can put it to work and see what it will do for you.

I don't claim I can make you rich over night. Maybe I can—maybe I can't. Sometimes I have failures—everyone has. But I do claim that I can help 90 out of every 100 people if they will let me.

The point of it all, my friend, is that you are using only about one-tenth of that wonderful brain of yours. That's why you haven't won greater success. Throw the unused nine-tenths of your brain into action and you'll be amazed at the almost instantaneous results.

The Will is the motive power of the brain. Without a highly trained, inflexible will, a man has little chance of attaining success. Yet the will, altho heretofore almost entirely neglected, can be trained into a wonderful power like the brain or memory and by the very same method—intelligent exercise and use.

If you held your arm in a sling for two years, it would become powerless to lift a feather, from lack of use. The same is true of the Will—it becomes useless from lack of practice. Because we don't use our Wills—because we continually bow to circumstance—we become unable to assert ourselves. What our wills need is practice.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open up for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you had will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. And those are only a few of the things the "secret" will do for you. The "secret" is fully explained in the wonderful book "Power of Will."

I know you'll think that I've claimed a lot. Perhaps you think there must be a catch somewhere. But here is my offer.

## More Proof

**Made $500 in Five Days**

"In five days' time it has made me $500. And I have other profitable things in sight."—G. C. Bennington, Centerton, O.

**Worth $15,000 and More**

"The book has been worth more than $15,000 to me."—Oscar B. Sheppard.

**Would be Worth $100,000**

"If I had only had it when I was twenty years old, I would be worth $100,000 today. It is worth a hundred times the price."—S. W. Taylor, The Santa Fe Ry., Milano, Texas.

**Salary Jumped from $150 to $800**

"Since I read 'Power of Will' my salary has jumped from $150 to $800 a month."—J. F. Gibson, San Diego, Cal.

**From $100 to $3,000 a Month**

"One of our boys who read 'Power of Will' before he came over here jumped from $100 a month to $3,000 the first month, and won a $250 prize for the best salesmanship in the State."—Private Leslie A. Still, A. E. F., France.

**Worth $3,000 to $30,000**

"From what I have already seen I believe I can get $3,000 to $30,000 worth of good out of it."—C. D. Van Vechten, Gen. Agent, Northwestern Life Insurance Co., Cedar Rapids, Ia.

**$897.00 Profit First Week**

"'Power of Will' is a compilation of mighty forces. My first week's benefit in dollars is $900—cost, $3.00; profit, $897.00."—(Figure what his yearly profit would be.)—F. W. Helstand, 916 Tribune Bldg., Chicago, Illinois.

**Another 50% Increase**

"More than a year ago I purchased 'Power of Will' and I firmly believe that it—and it alone—has enabled me to increase my salary more than 50 per cent in that time."—L. C. Hudgens, Boswell, Okla.

Among over 500,000 users of "Power of Will" are such men as Judge Ben. B. Lindsey; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, Ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Assistant Postmaster-Gen. Britt; Gov. McKelvie of Nebraska; General Manager Christeson of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, Former Vice-Pres. Art Metal Construction Co.; Ex-Gov. Ferris of Michigan, and many others of equal prominence.

# *Send No Money*

Send no money—no, not a cent. Merely clip the coupon and mail it to me. By return mail you'll receive not a pamphlet, but the whole "secret" told in this wonderful book, "POWER OF WILL."

Keep it five days. Apply some of its simple teachings. If it doesn't show you how you can increase your income many times over, mail the book back. You will be out nothing.

But if you do feel that "POWER OF WILL" will do for you what it has done for over five hundred thousand others—send me only $3.00 and you and I'll be square.

If you pass this offer by I'll be out only the small profit on a $3.00 sale. But you—you may easily be out the difference between what you're making now and an income several times as great. So you see you've a lot—a whole lot—more to lose than I.

Mail the coupon or write a letter now—you may never read this offer again.

A. L. PELTON
PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY
54-S Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

A. L. PELTON
PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY
54-S Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

You may send me "Power of Will" at your risk. I agree to remit $3.00 or remail the book to you in five days.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

# Classified Advertising

***The Purpose of this Department***

**is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.**

***Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:***

| | Line Rate | |
|---|---|---|
| Munsey's Magazine | $1.50 | Combination Line Rate $4.00 less 2% cash discount |
| Argosy-Allstory Weekly | 2.50 | |
| Minimum space four lines. | | |

**Nov. 26th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close Oct. 29th.**

## AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

**$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT**—regular $25.00 value. We are making this bargain offer to prove our remarkable values in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make $35.00 to $40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. K-204, Chicago.

**AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan** is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

**PUTNAM MADE $120 FIRST WEEK** selling patented vest-pocket windshield cleaner; motorists greatest need; one rub keeps glass clear 24 hours; guaranteed year; agents profit 140%. Security Mfg. Co., Dept. 506, Toledo, Ohio.

**AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendets,** a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

**HURRAH! GREAT NEWS.** Lucky "11" now at prewar prices. You can coin money from now till Christmas. Act quick. E. M. Davis, Dept. 58, Chicago.

**AGENTS COINING MONEY** selling Universal Gas Savers for every gas stove. Wonderful device. Cuts gas bills in half. Increases heat. Popular prices. 100% profit. Exclusive territory. Write quick. A. B. Moore, Gas Saver Company, Topeka, Kansas.

**BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS** for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

**WE START YOU** in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

**MEN WANTED TO EARN $3,000 TO $10,000 A YEAR.** Prepare quickly and easily through our amazing system for profitable and permanent business reclaiming waste paper for largest manufacturers in country. Boys do the work—you simply direct. Practically no investment necessary—a few dollars will start you. Simply send name for big free opportunity book—a post card will do. The Traub System, 349 Traub Building, Kansas City, Mo.

## MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

**CLAY LOAM LANDS**—20, 40, 80 acre tracts in clover district of Michigan; rich soil; $15 to $35 acre. Easy terms. Send for free booklet. Swigart Land Co., Y-1245, First National Bank Building, Chicago.

## MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

**PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS.** No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

## AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

**STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED** for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

## AUTOMOBILES

**Automobile Owners, Garagemen, Mechanics, Repairmen,** send for free copy of our current issue. It contains helpful, instructive information on overhauling, ignition troubles, wiring, carburetors, storage batteries, etc. Over 120 pages, illustrated. Send for free copy today. Automobile Digest, 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

## AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

**AGENTS—A NEW INVENTION. HARPER'S FIBRE BROOM** and ten-use brush set. It sweeps, washes and dries upstairs windows, scrubs porch ceilings and does seven other things. Big profits; easy seller. Free trial offer. Harper Brush Works, Dept. Y, Fairfield, Iowa.

**LIVE AGENTS MAKE $10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER** and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

**$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS,** perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

**LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER** wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

**MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES.** Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. Acme Letter Co., 2806 F Congress, Chicago.

**CREW MANAGERS—AGENTS. OPALINE PAINTINGS ARE A KNOCKOUT.** Make old territory new. Seasoned picture men double their sale. Beginners make $1.00 an hour and more with rigs. Greatest hit ever made. Samples and expense money furnished. Write today. Consolidated Portrait Co., Desk A-22, 1029 W. Adams St., Chicago.

**DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN** to sell your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 3,000,000 readers of the Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 B'way, N. Y.

## AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

**BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT.** Unlimited opportunity for Civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalogue. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

## PATENT ATTORNEYS

**INVENTIONS WANTED. CASH OR ROYALTY For Ideas.** Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 181-A, St. Louis, Mo.

**PATENTS.** If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

**PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured.** Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

**PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK** and evidence of conception blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

## SONG POEMS WANTED

**WRITE A SONG POEM.** You can do it. Write about Love, Mother, Home, Childhood, Comic, or any subject, and send words today. I compose music and guarantee publication. Edward Trent, 652 Reaper Block, Chicago.

**Write the Words for a Song.** We compose music and guarantee to secure publication on a royalty basis by a New York music publisher. Submit poems on any subject. Broadway Composing Studios, 238 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

**Classified Advertising continued on page 6.**

# How Would You Like to Earn $83 a Day?

## The true story of J. F. James, the shipping clerk who became president of a great manufacturing company. What was the secret of his success?

*By Richard W. Samson*

THE other day I spent a few precious hours with Mr. J. F. James, President of the Mascot Stove Manufacturing Company, of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Fifteen years ago he was working as a shipping clerk in a stove foundry for $9 a week. Today he is making $25,000 a year, or $83 a day. As Mike Murphy, the famous trainer, used to say—"You can't beat a man who refuses to be beaten."

Few men have started with as barren prospects as J. F. James. Born in the mountains of Tennessee, forced to leave school as a boy and go to work, he might easily have fallen into the rut and stayed there.

But one day, glancing through a magazine, he came across an advertisement which appealed to him so strongly that he read it twice and then tore it out of the magazine to read again.

**J. F. JAMES**
**Just 40 years old and earning $25,000 a year.**

It told how thousands of other men had won promotion through spare time study. How they had trained themselves to do bigger things! How they were ready when Opportunity came!

THAT day J. F. James made a resolution. He said that what others were doing, he could do! So he tore out that familiar coupon, marked it, signed it, and mailed it to Scranton. Though he did not fully realize it at the time, he had taken the first step along the Up-road to Success.

So it came about that J. F. James studied while other men wasted their time loafing or watching the clock. They are still doing it today—worn, discouraged men who cry out that Fate is against them and that "they never had a chance."

Doomed forever to small wages, fighting a losing fight against poverty, missing the good things of life, they cannot understand how James got ahead.

"I didn't make a drudge of myself," said Mr. James. "I had time for baseball and everything that seemed worth while. I had just as much fun as the other fellows, but instead of wasting time, I turned it into gold through my I. C. S. course.

"Every hour I invested in study has paid me better than any other investment I ever made.

"It has brought me a large income—the satisfaction that goes with success—the money to buy anything I want—a good home and an automobile for my wife and children—the esteem of all my friends. The I. C. S. made my success possible."

WHAT about you? Are you satisfied to stand just where you are? Or do you really want to be somebody? It all depends on what you do in your spare time.

"There is not a man in power at the Bethlehem Steel Works today," says Charlie Schwab, "who did not begin at the bottom and work his way up."

And one of these executives earns a million dollars a year!

For thirty years, the International Correspondence Schools have been helping men out of routine drudgery into work they like—to win advancement, to have happy and prosperous homes.

How much longer are you going to wait before taking the step that will bring you more money? Isn't it better to start now than to wait five years and then realize what the delay has cost you?

Here is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, mark and mail this coupon. It takes only a two-cent stamp and only a minute of your time, but it is the most important single thing you can do today! Do it right now!

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2226 B SCRANTON, PA.

Without cost or obligation on my part, please send me information about the course *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

- ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Electric Lighting and Rwys.
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENG.
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ Ship Draftsman
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Show Card and Sign Ptg.
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Correspondent
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer and Typist
- ☐ Cert. Public Accountant
- ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
- ☐ Railway Accountant
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ GOOD ENGLISH
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILES
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ Poultry Raising
- ☐ Spanish ☐ Teacher
- ☐ BANKING

Name.....

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

Occupation.....

BUY TODAY

10 MONTHS TO PAY

SPECIAL TERMS—Ten months' credit on any article selected from the SWEET catalogue. NO MONEY IN ADVANCE. Shipment made for your examination. First payment to be made only after you have convinced yourself that SWEET values cannot be equalled. If not what you wish return at our expense.

SPECIAL VALUE

SWEET'S CLUSTER: 7 Fine Diamonds, set in Platinum. Looks like 1½ ct. Solitaire.

Only $3.80 a month

No Red Tape—No Delay

Every transaction CONFIDENTIAL. You don't do justice to yourself and your dollars unless you inspect our unusual values in Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry, Silverware, Leather Goods, etc. Send TODAY for SWEET De Luxe Catalogue. Write NOW to Dept. 821-R.

Capital $1,000,000

"THE HOUSE OF QUALITY"

L·W·SWEET INC.

1650-1660 BROADWAY, NEW YORK



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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXVII SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1921 NUMBER 6

# Wolf of Erlik

## Part I

by J.U. Giesy *and* Junius B. Smith

Author of "Black and White," "The House of a Hundred Lights," "The Ivory Pipe," etc.

### CHAPTER I.

A CALL FROM AFAR.

I READ the letter—a thing couched in a script that mirrored the femininity of the writer in every well-formed curve and line. And then I sat there at the desk in my private room of our suite in the Urania, holding the little sheaf of pages in my hand. After a time and more carefully than at first, I went over them again:

Polyglotania, .....1010.

DEAR MR. GLACE:

I feel that I must write you, and yet I hardly know how to begin. The heading I have chosen for this letter is not my real address, which you will find on the last page, but rather a statement of a condition such as it seems to me should justify me in having coined a term. And it seems also as though with you, who were in such intimate contact with a phase of my existence, which, thanks to the Master and to you and your dear, dear wife, is now past, I might discuss this thing.

You will recall that my father in dying left me not only money, but a tract of some sixty thousand acres of land near our southwestern boundaries, and, of course, you know that immediately after our marriage, Mr. Garston and I came down to inspect it, since Mrs. Glace actually came to see us off on the train. The property was, in so far as we knew, totally unimproved, but Mr. Garston, being a civil engineer, felt, after a study of the drawings found among my father's papers, that it held great opportunities for developmental projects, both of an agricultural nature, and possibly of mines.

My friend, what do you suppose we actually found? The condition that my fanciful heading of the date line best explains. This inheritance of mine is peopled by men, yes, and women, of many races. There are Hindus, Malays, Russians, Mongolians of various clans, Mexican peons, men of Haiti and Santo Domingo, speaking a patois of French and Spanish. It seems unbelievable, and yet this little principality of mine, which I fancied without population, is in reality a very land of Babel—a place of many tongues. They have foregathered within its limits, are grazing their flocks and herds upon it, and tilling little farms.

Just what I am facing—just what it means really—I'm afraid I do not as yet fully comprehend; but I have my suspicions, and if they should prove to be correct, then I'm

rather of the opinion, my friend, that I have actually stumbled quite into one of the nerve centers connected with the schemes of those who serve Erlik the Spider and his overlord, the Prince of Darkness, Supreme Sovereign of the Damned.

What does it mean? Mr. Glace, you who are the intimate friend of the Master—of him to whom I owe my present life and happiness and all I am—I think I can answer that question—I, who for a time was the mental slave of that worshiper of Erlik, the Destroyer of Souls, the Mongol, Otho Khan, I think these people of many tongues are people of one mind. I think Otho Khan has sent them here for purposes of his own—because, while he made me a tool, which he meant to destroy once the work for which it had been fashioned was done, yet even so, in making me what I was when first you met me, he taught me very, very much of his own unclean knowledge, so that I think I understand his plan. And I think that these dwellers here, simple colonists of the land though they seem, are in reality other tools, fashioned for his purpose, and swayed by the mind of Otho Khan.

Always when I was with him he was prating of the powers of the mind. One of the things he told me was of a custom of the order to which he belongs. It was that when they desired anything to be accomplished, they gathered together and all thought about it, concentrating their minds upon it by means of ritualistic forms, and that after a time of such concentration, the thing was somehow done. My friend, do you see what I mean, and how he moved in his schemes?

Until my death under my father's will, he might not take that which was left me fully into his hands. But were I dead, then he could have seized upon it, and this supposedly barren, but actually peopled tract of land, would have remained, and—it would have been a brain center as it were—a gathering place such as he spoke of, wherein each and every dweller would have been ready at his command to concentrate his or her will toward the bringing about of those things at which he aims.

How long he has been sending them down here I do not know as yet, but through it all it would seem that he has been slowly, steadily, silently, and of a deliberate purpose, building himself a sort of artificial brain of enormous power, ready to answer to his demands. It is as though some one had planted a monster wireless station in some unsuspected place save that instead of the wireless current, this thing of his devising shall project when he commands it the thought waves of the human mind.

Mr. Garston was furious at finding them here and was for driving them off at once. But I have induced him to wait, and I am going to stay here until I have learned what I feel is to be learned.

If you think best, show this letter to the Master.

Sincerely your friend,
LOTIS GARSTON,
——— N. M.

P. S.—When I left the East it was with the firm determination to never employ the knowledge Otho Khan had given me again, but if I am right in thinking what I have found to portend a danger far greater than any aimed against any one individual, I shall not hesitate then to oppose him with those powers he was at so much pains to see that I gained.

I folded the pages together slowly. And as I did so, there crept through me a strange sensation, a seemingly actual cringing of my skin, a physical reflex of the emotions awakened in my brain.

It was a strange letter. It brought up a series of vivid mental pictures: First of the writer, Lotis Garston—Lotis Popoff, as she had been before her marriage—reed-slender, with her raven hair and brows, her white, white throat and face, wherein the line of her mouth was like a bow of living flame, and her strange way of throwing up her arm with a backward tilted hand, an advanced palm—of Lotis Popoff, in whose dark eyes the first time I intimately met her, there had lurked the torture of a lost soul, until he, whom she named the Master, had waked once more within them the fire of conscious redemption, and all that goes with what one may almost dare to term a paradise regained—and in so doing, had sent her at the last into Edward Garston's arms.

I had seen that happen, and it had been a strange, strange thing.

And next I thought of Otho Khan, the Mongol High Caste, who had been responsible for her condition when first I had known her, had robbed her of all conscience, persuading her that her soul was foredoomed to Erlik, already damned, no longer, save while her beautiful body was still alive, her own. Yes, I thought of Otho Khan, who had sent her to slay the Master, because he stood between him and the thing at which he aimed, that thing the letter mentioned—the establishing of unrest, disorder in the minds of men, to the result of

a final overthrow of law, order, of all higher motives, to red revolution and the downfall of present day civilization in the end.

Twice had the Master frustrated Otho Khan's plans—and on each occasion death had fallen on the Mongol's agents—one, the Chinaman Lee and the white woman fiend who was his filthy consort—on Michael Popoff, the Russian, Lotis's father. Yes, that was the way Otho worked. First, he made Popoff's child his slave, and then he sent her against the man who opposed him, to do murder in the name of vengeance, yet in reality to remove the one who had upset two of his schemes.

Sitting there I recalled how she had slipped into the apartment of the Master, where he and I waited her coming, in a breathless darkness, bearing the naked blade of a slender dagger in her hand. And I recalled swiftly all that had followed, until he had met her, faced her, proved stronger than either Khan or the hellish knowledge he had taught her, and so having literally freed her from the slavery the Mongol had placed upon her, gave her back to the love and protection of the man from whom Otho had tricked her, to destroy not only her soul but her body after she had served to further his plans.

Too, I recalled that in those days and nights which had culminated in Otho Khan's third defeat, the apprehension of still another of his agents, Georges Pitrininski, who had come against both the Master and Lotis after she had failed, I had more than once felt the same cringing of the skin I was now experiencing again, thanks to the realization of what she described in her letter might mean.

Otho Khan had been beaten thrice, but he was not done. He was no more done than Evil is ever wholly vanquished, or can be since Force is a Universal thing, and though opposed in principle and object, Good and Evil are paradoxically one. Five agents had Otho Khan lost. Three of them were dead, and the fourth, Pitrininski, had been tried as a federal prisoner and adjudged criminally insane.

And the fifth—well, she had written the letter I was holding in my hand—and unless I was a very poor judge of the fire of resentment, loathing, I myself had seen flame within her, once she had regained the full estate of womanhood with all its tender meaning, she was a little more than lost to Otho Khan, because, unless I was sadly short in comprehension, she would, if the need arose, not hesitate to employ against him those strange powers which, through his efforts to fashion her into a tool for his purpose, she had gained.

She knew the code of his Cult—that Black Brotherhood—those worshipers of Erlik, which seems to have existed always as the antithesis of every and all creeds aimed toward the uplift, the spiritual advancement of mankind. She knew its rituals and forms. To her Erlik was far and more than a name, was the vice regent on Earth of Satan, the Prince of Darkness—Sovereign of the Dark Star—of him who was cast in a prideful downfall out of Paradise itself, to become the Eternal Ruler of the Damned, who following him in rebellion against the law of the One, were cast out with him into the void wherein the Dark Star whirls.

Odd fancies these for a modern, twentieth century world, for a modern twentieth century man, one of a partnership which had set itself up for the detection of crime and its doer. And yet things that had filled my mind more or less ever since I had seen Lotis Popoff, as beautiful as sin may sometimes appear in its deceiving guise, as beautiful as a seductress, an enchantress, yet one having no hope, and without God in the World, come creeping like a ray of dark light from the star of darkness, toward the commission of a crime, that time before the Master tore away from her the soul destroying chains forged upon her by Otho Khan.

And after that, after the appalling and revolutionary realization of what we were witnessing had come upon us with its evidence of undreamed, little understood forces in operation, Bryce, my partner and I had discussed the thing many times. And out of it there had come to us an understanding of the germ of truth which has always lurked back of the folklore stories, the legendary narratives of the work of black magicians, sorcerers, necromancers, of were-

wolves, vampires, men who had sold their souls to the devil, were accompanied by "familiars" who wrought the wishes, the desires, of those men's minds.

We had come to realize that there is a germ of truth behind every persisting human story—and that those men had been Legionaries of the Dark Star—agents of that force of Evil men have denominated in all ages the Devil, Sathanis, Yam.

And the girl who had written my present letter had been the means of proving to us that there is truth in such things—that there are forces operating throughout the universe always, affecting the lives, the souls of men and women, far transcending the every day forces mankind knows on the material plane.

So much the Master himself had explained, after stating that all Force was one—all phenomena a manifestation of it and that what seemed the paradox of some force of common recognition might well be no more than the parallel of it, operative on a higher plane.

For the Master was our friend, save that we did not so call him. It was Lotis, after her literal redemption from that "all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish," which bound her, who had used the term. To James Bryce and myself he was, as always, Semi Dual, the strange, strong man, who dwelt in the tower of the Urania, where Jim and I had taken our office suite when we organized our private detective firm.

Like Otho Khan himself, he was a student of those Higher, and save by few unrecognized, Forces of Universal Creation, by which the World may one day be either redeemed or damned, except that he, devoting his life to their comprehension, sought ever to employ the knowledge so obtained for Good as opposed to Wrong.

Metaphysician is a term which possibly best describes Semi Dual, the man. And perhaps Lotis had not been far wrong in calling him the Master, since certainly he had obtained a wonderful mastery over what are commonly called " occult " things.

Only that Dual held nothing as " occult " in the commonly accepted meaning of the term. It was his philosophy that nothing was super or preternatural, because all Force was one, and being one was the enabling cause of any and everything. Manifestations of force of no matter what nature, were no more than a refraction of the element through an infinite number of Universal planes.

And as knowledge is said to be power, so, too, knowledge may well give to its possessor an impression of strength. Once in his presence, one knew that Semi Dual was strong. Strength lurked in his figure, tall, perfectly proportioned, in the splendid forehead, the slightly aquiline nose, the firm lips that could be so impassive in their repose. But more than that, it dwelt in his grey eyes, deep, steady, calm as strength may be—and beyond and transcending even that, it struck off from the man's entire personality, as a subtle, none the less real, though intangible thing.

All at once I felt myself glad that it was so, that Semi Dual was strong—that he was strong enough to have thrice defeated the ends of Otho Khan. Because now, if I rightly understood the letter I had just received, there could be small doubt that the Mongol legionary of the Dark Hosts of Evil was still busy with his schemes—that through him and his kind the world was faced by a danger more deadly than any natural cataclysm, any dread plague—a danger not only to the bodies of men but to their minds, and hence to their souls, since the mind was no more than the link that bound the body of the spirit to material things.

I read the last line preceding the signature, again:

" If you think best, show this letter to the Master."

Truly it mirrored Lotis Garston's frame of mind. I recalled her marriage to the young engineer, after she had become again all woman, freed of the obsession placed upon her by the Mongol fiend. I recalled too that she had gone West with the announced intention of getting back to a closer harmony with normal life, in the love of her husband and the solitude of vast empty places, where he and she might be together.

I knew she had held in her mind some picture of a sort of spiritual recuperation from

the dread ordeal through which she had passed. But fate—or the law of cause and effect, to which we give that name—would seem to have otherwise decreed. That law, be it understood, wastes little, and—that law is back of cosmic justice. Wherefore, Otho Khan, having fashioned a tool, had made also a boomerang.

Lotis and the Master. Suddenly it seemed to me as though from the very beginning the thing must have been ordained. Satan, the force of Evil, call it how one pleased, had raised up a danger in the person of Otho Khan, and since in nature there must ever be a counter balance, there were raised up also these two by whom his plans were fated to be overturned.

I got up. I left the office. I caught an elevator cage to the twentieth floor, left it, and mounted a stairway of marble and bronze. I came out into a garden—a thing of flowers and shrubs, with a tiny sun dial, a fountain—the setting Dual had constructed about the tower when he made it his abode.

I passed up a central path, across an inlaid plate that rang out a soft-toned chime of bells to announce my coming.

The door of the tower opened and showed me Semi's one companion in his seclusion—Henri, whom I had known for years.

" The Master—" it was so he, too, named the man I was come a seeking—" is within," he said and bowed.

I crossed an outer room to reach a farther door and tapped upon it.

" Come."

There was a quality, deep, calm, yet sonorous, in the answer.

I pushed the door before me and entered another room. It was long as the tower itself, lighted by two windows at one end, furnished in quiet, yet sumptuous fashion. And beside a great desk on the side next the door was seated a figure clad in robes of white, edged on cuff and hem with purple—a figure with a head, large, perfectly modeled, and a face, the lips of which, as they were lifted toward me, smiled. It was Semi Dual—the Master.

For a moment, he said no word. But his gray eyes held me. It was as though through them he thrust the fingers of his brain deep into my mind, as though he read it—drew out of it the troubled thoughts it contained. And then he spoke:

" Welcome my friend, who comes, as it has been ordained you would come from the beginning, at the appointed time. You bring me—"

" This," I said, and placed the letter in his hand.

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## CHAPTER II.

### " C'EST LA GUERRE."

HE read it.

I found myself a seat at the end of the desk, sinking into a chair I had occupied on more than one former occasion when I had come to this same room seeking help or advice from him in some matter that had proved too much for Bryce or myself, and watched. But I said nothing. Nor did Dual make any comment as his gray eyes scanned the clearly written lines.

Save for the slight whisper of the pages as he leafed them, there was no sound, if one excepts the slow rhythmic ticking of a huge clock in one corner. And its voice, numbering the span of the time we sat there in such fashion, seemed almost a part of the silence, so intimately had it come to be associated with the surroundings of Semi Dual, in my mind. It was no more than a part of the atmosphere about him, who was wont to speak of All Life as the " Wheel." And the Wheel was always turning with the same steady, unfaltering sweep in which the old clock drew the unresting circle of its hands.

Consciously I did not let my mind dwell upon it then, but now I know that as I sat watching the face of the reader, seeking to mark upon it some effect of Lotis Garston's letter, I heard too the slow *tick-tock, tick-tock,* like the footfalls of some stolid marcher down the Path of Time.

Then Semi bunched the pages of the letter together and lifted his face, turning his eyes upon me. They were calm, steady, direct in their regard, those eyes, and yet—that was only on the surface. And—under it—I became conscious as I looked back

into their depths, of a something, a spark of meaning, a subtle, unnameable something, not unlike the effect of a rift between two somber curtains back of which a clear light burned. In such fashion an undismayed spirit may look out of the eyes of a man or a woman at times.

Some way it thrilled me, set me a-tingle. It lifted me up, seemed to strengthen me in some undreamed of way, even while it hinted of things I did not understand, or if at all, only vaguely. And yet—I found it forcing, as it were, the impulse for the framing of certain words from my mind:

"C'est la guerre?" I said in the end.

"War, yes." Dual returned. "War—the Eternal conflict between Good and Evil, my friend—between Right and Wrong—which never ceases nor will while the Wheel of material creation goes round—in which Evil is forever rising to confront the course of those on the Path of Advancement, no matter how many times it is overthrown and cast down. How is it Revelations puts it? 'And there was war in heaven: Michael and His angels going forth to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels; and they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down and his angels were cast down with him.'"

"Satan?" I repeated.

"Satan, Lucifer." Dual inclined his head. "Of whom Ezekiel says: 'How art thou fallen from heaven O Day Star, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, that didst lay low the nations!—Thou wast the anointed cherub—thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou was perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till unrighteousness was found in thee—and thou saidst in thy heart I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God—I will ascend above the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'

"Satan, my friend, the Spirit of Evil, which seeks ever to exalt itself above the All Good—the Spirit of Evil come upon the World—the evil thing that lurks in the breast of every child of man from the hour of its birth until death closes its eyes, between which and the good involved equally with it there is warfare never ceasing—since as it is below so is it above, and the struggle in the heart of man on Earth becomes the finite expression of that warfare between the All Good and the Supreme Evil in an Infinite Universe."

For a moment as he paused I found my brain filled with those whirling fancies of unclean intelligences, of obsessions, possessions—those fragments of folk tales and legendary lore which had crept into it at times ever since Lotis Popoff as she was then had come through the night of this same room to compass his death, and then:

"Do you mean an actual Spirit?" I asked.

"Let us say Element rather," he answered slowly. "For who may know God, or who the opposing degree of the Scale of Creation, since God being Spirit and Light, the opposite must be of a material nature, equally past the comprehension of the finite mind, the thing in or of the Dark Star, at which astronomers today are beginning to guess faintly—which reflects not light, but absorbs it, destroys it like some dread and unthinkably absorbent sponge."

"The abode of Erlik, the Destroyer of Souls," I said quickly.

"The junk heap, the sink, the stinking cesspool of the World—the Dark Star involving into itself, Gordon my friend, all within its magnetic plane—the disintegrating point of lost souls—toward which once the life of the material body ceases—they being still material must be inevitably drawn—save the spirit and the soul be one. The Spirit being of God, returns again to Him, but the soul it has left is drawn into the maw of the Destroyer and is as though it had never been."

"Do you mean an actual planet—a material thing?" I questioned.

"Yes," he said with no least hesitation. "Its existence has been known to the Sheiks el Djebel—the leaders of the Cult of Devil Worshipers for years. It is upon its existence that their cult is reared. Hence they cry on Erlik the Prince of the Dark

Star, the Destroyer of Souls, and in so crying speak truth. Well are they called necromancers, for are they not dead, though physically living, who have broken the tie that binds the Spirit to the Soul?"

"Dead?" I exclaimed.

"Dead save in the material existence," said Semi Dual. "They are become as a band of ghouls."

"And we're opposing things like that—a little less than human?" I broke out, staring at him. "Good God, Semi—"

"Steady my friend," he said. "This matter is as deep, as all embracing as the All in All itself. None may understand it save in degrees. Man before the Eternal Mystery and Purpose of Creation stands a pygmy, gazing upon the billowing curtains that reach into the infinitude above him, veiling the Plan of Eternity from his eyes. Yet since we presuppose the Living Dead, so too may we assume the Dead Alive. The one is not only the parallel but the paradox of the other—even as Good and Evil are but manifestations of the One Force of Existence, one manifestation of which we call life. And the key to the Mystery of Good and Evil lies in the manner in which that Force is used.

"Man is a free moral agent in as much as he may choose. Hence is it said truly that he who loses himself shall find all else, since the path of attainment lies in self-forgetting, and the opposite way consists mainly in the polarization of the same individual powers on the plane of Self. Thus does the Deceiver betray his disciples, since in seeming to promise all things, he who seeks in such fashion to gain them is destroyed. Do you not see wherein the paradox is readily harmonized?"

I nodded. "It all depends on how the Force of Creation which is One Force is used."

"Briefly, yes. Force—*akasa*, call it what you will, is one. It may be used thisly or thusly, for right or for wrong. Yet he who wrongfully employs it, is in its wrong employment damned. As for example, an explosive charge which may, rightly used, expend its power toward the advancement of human ends, or improperly handled destroy the handler. Yet is the explosive charge the same in both cases and holds in itself nothing of either right or wrong. So with the akasa—the Universal force which permeates all universal things, is of them and in them—the stuff of which their substance is formed. If it be polarized, held to a material level wholly, must it not meet a material end?"

"I supose so," I agreed. Frankly the discussion was getting rather beyond my depth. "What gets me," I went on, "is why the Omniscience which created the Universe ever permitted Evil in the first place."

Dual smiled slightly. "It has 'got' many a man beside yourself, my friend. But—can you have a line with only one end, or a circle without a circumference? Hold fast to the primal truth, that Good and Evil are one from the beginning. What is a day save man's effort to measure Time? Or what is Time save the measure of Eternity itself within man's span? Hence is Good or Evil no more than a measure of man's employment of that Force of which he is both a product and a part?

"For look you, Gordon, there is one thing which never dies, and that thing is life. Life is. It is the vibration between the ions of akasa, as science today is beginning to realize. And an ion is no more than a droplet out of the ocean from which all manifest created forms are made.

"Death as we know it, then, consists in no more than the withdrawal from the body ions of that vibratory rate by which its so called life was maintained, a process which usually extends through several days—as witness scientific experiment within the last score of years, in the grafting upon living subjects in need of such procedure, of skin taken from the amputated arms or limbs of others compelled through accident to lose them, and the success of the endeavor—the taking hold, the recuperation of the life in the bits of skin and their growth, even though the member from which they were obtained was in the broadest sense of the term, past any question dead."

I sat up sharply. His last words woke a parallel in my mind. It seemed to me on the instant as though so he was explaining his use of the words "Dead Alive" in refer-

ence to the unclean brotherhood to whom Otho Khan and others like him belonged.

"Those men—" I said sharply. "You mean they are individuals out of whom the life is being drawn slowly?"

He smiled again faintly. "Out of whom the Light of the Spirit is being slowly expelled through their own improper use of—by reason of their prostitution of their own involved Divine Essence, if one may so employ the term—their perversion of their individual powers to improper ends. Death to such a one means that his soul goes into the Oblivion of Nothingness and his body to the worms.

"It is the creed of those of the Silent Towers—that Life is of God and returns to Him—and the Life being indrawn to its Source, what but the material remains. Hence with them Life and its living embraces all of Advantage, of Enjoyment, of Power, which may be gained."

"What of Lotis's letter?" I queried as he paused. "Do you think Otho Khan is really doing what she seems to think—that those people she found there are his agents?"

"I think," he said, "that Otho Khan, the Mongol, Sheik el Djebel, came to this country for a purpose he has not yet attained."

"And he will try again?"

Dual inclined his head. "In my estimation—and apparently in hers—and remember that, as she herself says, he taught her many things. Remember, also, that in our first acquaintance with her, I very carefully set up her astrological figure—and that even though defeated in his efforts, he suffered no more than a repulse."

"You mean there is something in her horoscope to indicate trouble at the present?" I said. I knew astrology was one of the things in which he sincerely believed—and I had seen him prove the correctness of his deductions derived from it on many an occasion. "Was that what you meant when I came up here in saying I came at the appointed time?"

"Practically," he assented. "At least I knew that even though she went West with the intent of recuperating in a measure from the experience she had been through, her peril was not at an end. Yet I deemed she would gain strength more rapidly in the love and companionship of her husband, and I have maintained a watch upon my figures of her astral chart ever since. Moreover, I have had a letter from Garston himself."

He opened a drawer of his desk and placed in my hand an envelope bearing the same postmark as that I had carried to him.

I drew out the single sheet it contained and read it with a quickened attention:

MR. SEMI DUAL:

Dear Friend—Once more as it seems it is to you who have held so large a part in the destiny of myself and wife, that I must turn.

As you know when we came out here we fancied that Lotis's inheritance was practically an undeveloped tract of land. We found it fairly well populated with a polyglot population of various races, the individual tenants operating small ranches or farms. So far as I can learn these people are merely "squatters" with no right save that of tenure, but their presence seems to have excited a belief on the part of my wife that they are in reality agents or something like that of Otho Khan.

After her experience with that human fiend, I can hardly blame her no matter how far fetched the notion may seem. But, frankly, I'm wondering if her terrible ordeal has not left some morbid fancies still persistent in her mind.

I'm asking you for any advice you may give in regard to the situation so far as Lotis is concerned, and I'm thanking you for it in advance, as I know it will be forthcoming. Sincerely,

EDWARD GARSTON.

I folded up the letter and gave it back to Semi.

"Garston," I said, "doesn't understand."

"His anxiety is but natural," he returned. "And I wrote him to disabuse his own mind of the thought that his wife was mentally unbalanced. If you will note, his letter was written before yours, and since posting my reply I have, as Lotis herself would probably put it, felt the fingers of her mind."

"When?" I stiffened.

"In the watches of the night last passed, my friend."

"Then," I said urged by an eagerness I did not try to conceal, "something has happened since she wrote me. She sent you a telepathic message?"

"In the days when we wrested her from the clutches of the Mongol," he said slowly, "there grew up a sympathetic quality between the ions of her brain and mine. Thought projection was something Otho Khan taught her."

"And?" I prompted. Weird as the conversation was coming to seem, I no longer balked the ability of those who had developed the power to control the thought waves of the brain as more than a step beyond the wireless.

"She too knows it is war," Dual returned. "Young though she is in years, yet have the experiences through which she has passed being turned to a good advantage made her exceedingly strong. She is become as a shining blade tempered in the flame."

"What happened," I asked, "or did you learn?"

"She has been tempted by the Devil," he made answer. "She has been taken up into the high places and shown the kingdoms of the World."

The answer was cryptic. I did not try to understand. I simply stared back into Dual's inscrutable face and asked another question.

"Is that girl in danger?"

"In danger, yes," he said. "Yet in a way is her position strong. For forewarned of danger, she is thrice armed against any of the agents of Otho Khan, and strong in her knowledge is she able to defend herself before their machinations. At present her main concern is for the overthrow of his schemes and the welfare of Garston."

"Garston?" I echoed.

"Aye. He is her husband, and as you say, he does not as yet understand. Therein is one of her weaknesses—perhaps the greatest. Her destiny has become joined with his. Think you they will fail to strike at her if they may, through him?"

I took a long breath. It was a damnable thought, but—it was one I could not gainsay. I got up and paced across the room and back.

"Then what are we going to do?" I demanded. "Are we going to sit here and let her fight it out alone, or are we going out there?"

"Patience," said my friend. "We shall do what we shall do at the appointed time. Do you recall how Otto Khan's agent, Georges Pitrininski, at the time of his apprehension, cried out that he had felt the fingers of her intelligence thrust into his brain—or the night on which before that she sought so to learn Otho Khan's plan?"

I nodded.

Dual went on. "Wherefore because of the knowledge she is possessed of, and having reached my intelligence with hers inside the past twenty-four hours, she, who has now become a watcher, as one on guard, will, should the need arise, be able to equally reach me again."

"Then?" I said.

"Patience, and yet patience. That patience inspired of the knowledge that before the sincere cry of a soul demanding its divine right of advancement, not even the ramparts of Gog and Magog, or all the Sheiks el Djebel who have ever been, may stand, nay nor yet the old Dragon, who, seeking to exalt himself, was himself overthrown."

I gave it up. He had fallen into one of the moods in which he spoke in symbolic fashion, not being ready to speak in a more explicit manner concerning a thing. But he had said it was to be war, and I had no longer any doubt that we would be in it.

"All right," I accepted what seemed to me his reassurance. "Then we wait."

"Wait—aye," he assented slowly.

I left him, went back to the office and sat down.

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## CHAPTER III.

NORMAN HADDON, D. J.

WE were facing war then— war with Otho Khan. On this sunshiny day, in the midst of a modern city, the thing seemed wild, beyond all imagining, like the figment of some bizarrely distorted dream. And even while I sat there, the forces of Evil were gathering together like the banking clouds of a storm—and the unclean minds of the Sheik el Djebel, as Semi Dual had called him, and his fellows were reaching out once more in their endeavor

to affect the minds of their fellow men—to the end that all sanity, all decency, all—all the world of man as I now knew it, might be overthrown—toward the production of turmoil, strife, discord of every nature, to rebellion, revolution, out of the reek of which the Worshipers of Erlik were to rise in the end Supreme.

But that—that too was a weird, an unthinkable dream—a nightmare.

I buzzed for Bryce. There was a little alleyway between his private quarters and mine through which we might pass back and forth without entering the outer office. And it suddenly occurred to me that he should be acquainted with the latest developments in a matter into which one or both of us seemed now inevitably fated to be drawn.

I sat back and waited until he came bustling in with a short clipped greeting.

"Comin' up. What's on your mind now m'son?"

I told him—the whole thing.

He whistled at mention of Lotis's letter and its contents, pursed out his stubby brown mustache and sat with his heavy set figure leaning a trifle forward, his elbows on the arm of his chair until I was done.

"Otto the Devil," he said then, nodding. It was the way he had come in the days past to speak of Otho Khan. "But what's eatin' you, Gordon? Dual's been keepin' tabs on that jasper accordin' to his own say so right along. You know how he does it with them astrological figures of his—them cart wheels an' curli*me*cues an' signs, what are enough to drive an average man off his mind. An' he says Lotis has got to be a watcher, don't he—that she's on guard, an' that he'll know it any time it's necessary for us to be buttin' in?"

"He does," I agreed, somewhat surprised at the way Jim took it, even though I knew his faith in Dual and his strange use of Nature's forces was as great as mine. "But the idea of that girl being out there in the midst of those fiends Otho seems to have planted, any one of whom would be ready to kill her at a word from his master, sort of gets me, Jim."

He nodded. "Well yes. An' it would get me too if she was an ordinary sort of woman, but as it is she's a bad proposition for any of them sub-devils to tackle, the way I see it, if you get what I mean. Otto taught her a darned sight too much for his own good, seein' as how she's seen fit to break with him."

He paused and went on again quickly: "I bet that's what Semi meant by sayin' she'd been tempted by th' Devil since she wrote that letter. I bet he meant Otto th' Devil, an' that yellow guy has been tryin' to get her to flop over to his side again."

"Good God!" I said and paused at the sound of a tentative rapping.

"Come in."

The door of my den was pushed open and Danny Quinn, the red-headed youngster who served the firm of Glace & Bryce in the capacity of office boy, entered.

"He's back again," he announced, placing a bit of engraved cardboard in my hand, "an' he wants to see both you an' Mr. Jim."

I glanced at the card and my interest quickened.

"Mr. Norman Haddon."

The words called a picture to my mind. It was that of a slender, impeccably clad, almost foppish appearing person, one who might well have been judged at first glance a member of that type of masculinity commonly known as "a man about town"—a sort of human lily who neither toiled nor spun. He *had* been to our office before, even as Dan's declaration had served to indicate, and, now to quote the observant youth still further, he was "back."

I frowned. Some way his coming seemed more than a mere coincidence. Because Norman Haddon was a living instance of the oft-repeated allegation that things are not always what they seem. Back of his apings, his mannerisms, his at times inane words and actions, there lurked, as I knew, a very different man from what they might lead one, were indeed meant to lead one, to suppose. And that man was one of an indefatigable purpose, an unfaltering persistence, an unshakable nerve.

Norman Haddon, in short, was a D. J. man. He was an agent of the Department of Justice—one of the eyes, the ears, by which the safety of the social body and the

nation was bulwarked and served. Wherefore what mankind in the rough knew as Norman Haddon was, in so far as it served his and the Department's ends, no more than a cleverly maintained disguise.

On the occasion of his former call, he had been engaged in the running down of a most remarkable band of dealers in illicit drugs. Now as I passed his card across to my partner, I asked myself what his present visit might portend.

"Holy Smoke!" Bryce exploded and lifted his eyes from the card to mine. They were alert, somewhat narrowed of lid, lighted by unvoiced conjecture.

"If you ain't goin' to see him I better go tell him. He's standin' out there waitin'. He's so dolled up I guess he's afraid to sit down in his clothes," Danny suggested.

"That will do, Daniel," I said. He was a character who, presuming on both Jim's and my own liking for him, rather did and said what he pleased. "Show Mr. Haddon in."

Then as he withdrew, I glanced again at Bryce and found him fumbling in a pocket for a cigar without shifting his glance from the door through which Haddon must enter. There was an odd expectancy on his face that seemed in some way to foreshadow future things.

The door was opened again and our visitor appeared.

"Morning, you chaps," he greeted, smiling. As always he was debonair, groomed to the last degree of fashion, entirely at his ease. There was a tiny blue flower in his buttonhole, I remember, and he was twirling a light and flexible stick, which he shifted in order to grip Jim's hand and mine, before he sank with an effect of an actually physical lassitude, into a chair.

"Hello, Haddon. What brings you here?" Bryce inquired with the bludgeon bluntness he had developed what time he was an Inspector of Police, and had never discarded.

"Yes," I followed up; "are you a bird of passage merely or a falcon with an eye upon the quarry?"

"Both." Haddon waved a slender, perfectly manicured hand, from which he was stripping a glove. "Both—always and ever, old dear. Here, there, everywhere, I wander. I never tarry. I'm a plaything of fate, a creature of circumstance. Eh, what?"

"Yes, and a darned dangerous plaything too," Bryce retorted. "However, seein' that you've lit for the present, what besides that dicer of yours was you carryin' on your mind when you busted in here?"

Norman Haddon smiled faintly. "Direct as ever. Eh, Bryce, old thing? Well, no matter. A straight line—and so forth, as we used to say at school. Q. E. D. Georges Pitrininski was adjudged criminally insane, I hear."

Georges Pitrininski! I felt my every nerve stiffen. It wasn't an hour since Semi Dual had named the same man to me, and now here was Haddon—a federal agent.

"Georges Pitrininski," Jim erupted. "Haddon, cut out the pink tea chatter and get down to tacks. Both Glace and I know you ain't half as big a fool as you sound or look. What about Pitrininski's bein' found bughouse?"

"He was, wasn't he?" Haddon laughed.

Jim nodded. "Yep. They decided Georges was balmy."

"And the chap's talk concerning—wasn't it the Prince of Chaos, he called him—some sort of Spirit of Evil with a group of human worshipers and emissaries and all that sort of thing, bent on overturning all law and order, was enough to justify the verdict?" Haddon paused on a rising inflection.

"You'd think so, wouldn't you?" Jim grunted. "But that's the trouble. I don't know whether it was or not."

"Eh?" said Haddon sharply, and then more slowly. "You aren't going in for demonism—black magic—that sort of thing; are you, Bryce?"

"Look here," I interposed before Jim could answer. "Haddon—what is it you want?"

And abruptly he sloughed off his pose of languor; the real man stood forth.

"Information," he said tersely.

"About Georges Pitrininski?"

"About him and everything else connected with his apprehension, particularly the last—those ravings of his on which the insanity verdict was based, for example."

"And the Department?" I suggested.

He nodded. "Of course. You're right. There were things in the course of his trial that led the Department to think some of it might be based on an element of truth—a sort of distorted expression of actual fact. So—well, they shot me out on the matter. I knew you boys were mixed up in his apprehension."

"We were," I agreed; "also Semi Dual and Lotis Popoff and her fiancé, Edward Garston."

"Lotis Popoff," he repeated. "That's the girl Pitrininski insisted on calling 'The Traitress'?"

"Yes."

"What did he mean by that?"

I asked a question: "You're conversant with the facts brought out in the trial, aren't you?"

"Yes. I was furnished a transcript and I've read it. It's weird, to say the least."

"Suppose," I said as he paused, "that I tell you the story as Bryce and I know it, and that after that you ask us what you please."

"Righto!" he assented. "But while we're on the subject of the trial, there is one more question I should like to ask."

"Well?" I waited.

"In naming Lotis Popoff the 'Traitress', Pitrininski actually called her 'the Traitress to the Master.'"

"That's Otto the Devil," said Bryce.

"Who?" Haddon demanded sharply.

"Otto Kahn or Otho Khan, according to how you like it. He spells it one way in this country and the other in his. He's a Mongol, really."

"Mongol—you mean a Tartar?" I noted the spandrils of Haddon's cleanly chiseled nostrils quiver.

Jim chuckled. "Correct. He's a Tartar all right. Go ahead, Gordon—shoot—give him both barrels."

Haddon nodded. His debonair air had departed. As I began my story I noted that his lips were a trifle compressed and that there were little lines of tension radiating outward from the corners of his eyes. Yet he leaned back in his chair with his stick across his knees and heard me through without once bringing me to a pause.

And then he sat up. "Glace," he said, "that is the most remarkable narrative I have ever heard. Of course I've both heard and read stories dealing with devil worship, necromancy, sorcery, whatever you like, but I thought that sort of thing had gone out of vogue with the Salem witches in this country at least."

"You can think what you please," Jim cut in, "but on the level, Haddon, somebody did something to Popoff's kid. They made her think she'd sold her soul to the devil until Dual got her to thinking the other way about, and then—well, she turned against him and she took a big part in getting Pitrininski into your people's hands."

"I'm not doubting, as it happens," Haddon replied, and his voice was suddenly tense. "I know both of you and I know Dual, and as it happens a lot of this checks out. We've known of this Otto Kahn party for—some time—we've even known he wasn't a German no matter how he spells his name—but we've known of him as the head of the Society for Spiritistic Research—an organization never exceedingly active in any public sense in so far as we have been able to learn since it was organized—and, see here! About this tract of land in the Southwest? You know we got the gang that was running that opium game here the last time I saw you, but we never found out where they got their drugs. Is it possible the two things hook up; that those folks down there, no matter whether they're doing what the woman thinks or not, were mixed up in the matter? They're close to the border, and she says there are Mexicans among them. Could they have been smuggling the stuff across?"

I stared. I heard Jim catch his breath. Here was a new angle of the matter, a new thread, in the web Otho Khan and his fellows were spinning—perhaps.

"My aunt, yes," Bryce broke out in a tone of excitement. "Haddon, I reckon you've hit it—or a part of it, at least."

"And the other part?" said Haddon, now incisively alert.

"Let us revert to Pitrininski's allusion to a Prince of Chaos," I suggested. "The real aim—toward which all other things are

but steps in attaining the final object—is the overthrow of all constituted law and order, the upheaval of the social fabric, the production of a literal state of chaos among the human race, upon which they may prey to the acquirement of wealth and an overwhelming power; the bestializing, the brutalizing of mankind; the collapse of our present day civilization; a materializing of all impulse; a return to savagery; a substitution of might for right, of force for justice, of superstition for religion, of unsanctity, lust, rapine, for spiritual uplift, chastity, legitimate competition."

For a moment Haddon made no comment and then he said slowly, "Good God!" and caught his breath. "This Popoff girl—once she regained her normal balance—what sort of a woman is she, Glace? Can you trust her?"

"I think," I returned, "that her letter should answer that. She knows, Haddon. She was Otho Khan's mental slave. I think the mere fact that she writes as she does is sufficient proof that she believes what she says to be the truth."

"And she thinks that Khan and his associates are actually possessed of supernatural powers?"

"That they possess the ability to employ forces little understood by the mass of mankind, by means of which they plan to bring about their own selfish ends through influencing and swaying the minds of the masses."

"Forces little understood," he repeated. "A sort of general hypnotism, do you mean?"

"Hardly. More of a general telepathic influence, as I understand it," I said. "She wrote that it was as though he were building himself an artificial brain. Get this straight, Haddon. If all creative manifestations are manifestations of one force, then thought is a force and the concentrated thought not of one man alone, but of many may well produce the effect toward which it is aimed. Look at the wave of spiritualism sweeping the world to-day. Are we to believe what it seems or something else—the effect of spirits that have passed on—or—the work of intentionally deceptive intelligence, influencing gullible minds?"

"Eh?" He was actually staring, his attention strained. "You mean?"

"I don't know what I mean exactly," I confessed, "except that I do believe that there is a dreadful danger, of which spiritualism is a part, to-day threatening not only the bodily, but the mental welfare of mankind and that men like Otho Khan—men who have foresworn all that is high or noble; men to whom self is God; who have literally polarized themselves on the plane of selfish, material advantage—are behind it, and that unless something is done to forestall them, they are going to drag mankind down to its undoing. They're—well, I don't know what to call them unless vampires of the race."

"They're men, aren't they?" he said, frowning.

"Yes, they're men," I admitted. "But they've lost something." I was finding it hard to express myself.

"Lost something?" I saw the pupils of his eyes begin to widen.

"Yes. The thing that makes them human. They're not. They're inhuman. They look like men or women, but—they've actually foredoomed their own souls."

"Eh?" He put up a finger and ran it about inside his collar. "You really believe that, Glace?"

I inclined my head. "I can't help it after what I saw in this Pitrininski matter."

He shifted his glance to Bryce. All at once he seemed vastly, even if vaguely, shaken.

And Jim answered his silent question. "I got to. I'm like Gordon. After what I seen I got to admit there's more in this devil matter than just a thing to help support th' church."

"And the girl," Haddon said slowly. "Your friend Dual believes her experience left her mentally balanced?"

"She's sane," I told him, "whether Pitrininski is or not. She is possibly saner than you or I or the average man or woman, because she knows more. Khan taught her, and she is able to employ the same forces he is accustomed to use."

"Sort of deviless, eh?" Haddon smiled, but his lids remained narrowed.

"Well, I don't know," said Bryce. "You

don't want to forget those forces can be used two ways, an' what is bad to good, may be pretty darned good to worse. To my way of thinking, she's come clean. She's stumbled onto this layout of Otto's and wised us up about it."

"By Jove, yes," Haddon nodded. "See here, there's another word keeps coming up in Pitrininski's testimony. Who or what is *Erlik?*"

I gave him all I really knew in one sentence: "The vice-regent of Satan, Prince of Darkness on earth, sometimes known as the Spider, the Devourer of Souls."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A CALL FOR HELP.

*SNAP!* Haddon's stick broke in two in his hands. He looked down, lifted his eyes in an almost apologetic fashion, and cast the fragments aside. Then he grimaced. The action seemed to give him back his momentarily lost control.

"At that rate, and considering what you've told me, this Otho Khan and his gang are planning to pry the lid off of hell," he drawled.

Jim nodded. "Just about."

"And in view of the fact that my mission is to see that the lid stays on, that lets me into the thing, I guess. It would appear that I came to the right market when I started after information."

"You've got our entire stock such as it is," I told him.

"And my next logical step is to see the man on the roof."

He tilted back his head and stared at the ceiling, and brought his eyes down again at the sound of a staccato buzz.

I actually jumped.

"*Zzzzz! Zzzzz!*"

I got up. Startled as it left me, I recognized the sound for what it was. There was a little telephone-box on the wall of my room, facing the desk—one end of a private line that led from Dual's quarters. I reached for the receiver and got it off the hook.

"Yes," I said in a voice not entirely steady. "Glace speaking."

Semi's words came back to me distinctly. "If Mr. Haddon desires to see me, Gordon, suppose you bring him up."

"Very well," I agreed, and turned back from the phone with a nervous sort of laugh. The thing was uncanny—as little to be expected in the ordinary sense as everything else. And yet it was not even surprising if one knew Semi Dual, if one believed in the eery sort of power I knew from past experiences to be his.

Haddon had been sitting here for an hour, discussing the matter closer to Semi's interest, as I knew at this time, than anything else—and whether he had mentioned it earlier or not, he had been thinking of visiting Dual of course. As a result Semi had simply picked up his thought wave, read it, and acted in that calmly assured way that sometimes left one almost gasping.

"The man on the roof quite evidently agrees with you," I announced. "He suggests that we call upon him."

"Eh?" Haddon got up smiling. "Well—that's like him, by Jove. He's so much, too much, for me to comprehend rightly, Mr. Glace, that I'm hoping he will prove too much for the Tartar also. More telepathy, I suppose—his knowing of my presence."

"In so far as either Bryce or I are concerned," I said, as we all went out to catch an up-going cage.

But it was something more than telepathy, as Dual's first remark, after we were inside the tower, and had exchanged the ordinary greetings, showed.

Your presence, Mr. Haddon, is but another manifestation of the way in which the One Inscrutable moves. His purposes are as measured in their courses as the sweep of the stars and as little swayed. Hence, it has been without surprise that I have felt the thoughts you have directed toward me, beating against my brain with a gradually increasing force, the past two days."

Haddon glanced at Bryce and me as he answered. "Quite so, Mr. Dual. Naturally, I've been thinking of coming here for an interview ever since I was asked to investigate what might lie back of the Pitrininski case. But you say you were not

surprised. Am I to assume that you knew of my coming in advance?"

"Of yours, no—not in the individual sense, that is," Dual said. "But—of a force raised up to oppose Evil purpose, yes. For since it is written that Evil may not triumph in the eventual end of things, it was time that such a force should be so raised. And since this evil is aimed largely at the nation of which you are an agent, it was not hard to assume that it would take the form of some step on the part of the nation itself, through an agent or some number of the agents by which that nation is served. You know my methods of arriving at my conclusions, Mr. Haddon—"

"Through a study of astrological charts?" Haddon suggested quickly.

"Yes. That being the case I shall say merely that I have not ceased their study as applying to this matter since Lotis Garston went West with her husband, to what she hoped was a physical and spiritual recuperation from the ordeal through which she had passed."

Haddon nodded. "What she hoped," he repeated. "You mean you knew that hope was false."

"In so far as an enduring peace was concerned." Dual inclined his head. "Otho Khan, in making her what she was when first I knew her, created a peril to himself. There can be no peace between them while one of them remains alive."

"Then the girl is in actual danger?" Haddon said.

"In a physical danger, yes, but a danger of which she is fully aware—against which she is able to personally defend herself. Her position is peculiar in its strength. Mr. Haddon, I have already said that the Inscrutable moves in a mysterious way to bring about his ends. In the midst of Otho Khan's people, she, whose destruction he sought to accomplish with my own, is unassailable by them because of the knowledge he taught her.

"Wherefore, her removal from the path of his schemes may entail Otho Khan's own presence, and if so—if in the end he come against her in person, who do you think will triumph—she, who being freed from the power he once held above her, has gone to her husband, has found her soul figuratively at least fused with his, and in that fusing has become the Guardian Priestess of the Flame of Life itself, or he, who through the perversion of the spark of life within him, has so dimmed its light that it is become no more than the charring wick of a candle gone out?"

Semi asked the question and paused. There followed a little silence. But I thrilled some way to the suggestion of his words; the hint they contained of material events, caught in a mesh of symbolic phrases; of an impending duel—a strange, indescribable sort of duel, in which the weapons were to be the powers of the human soul itself; a life-and-death struggle; a supreme and final test between the Mongol sorcerer and the girl—the child he had taken and sought to make a tool to his purpose, thereby in the final equation succeeding in making her what she now was.

I felt Jim's eyes upon me and knew he, too, understood all Semi's question embraced.

"And there's that," he said, speaking all at once.

"Quite so," Haddon assented and cleared his throat. "By Jove! She's married to Garston, and she'll fight not only for herself, but him. And about that land—" He explained his suspicions as to the possible smuggling of drugs across the border.

"Quite possible, Mr. Haddon," Dual said at the end. "Otho Khan and his associates aim at the demoralization of the social fabric, and there is no more subtle debauchery of both mind and body than the debauchery of drugs. It is possible that the local sale which you, with myself, were instrumental in curtailing, was supplied in some such manner."

Haddon nodded. He took a deep breath. "That's enough. I'm going down there," he declared. "If you'll supply me with the name of the nearest station I'll take a look into this. And I say—if you can suggest some way in which I can be of service to that young woman I'll be glad. Anyway, I'll put men on this Khan person, and if he takes a notion to go out there, we'll know when he makes the move. If these devils are going to strike at her—"

"They are already striking at her, Mr. Haddon," Semi said.

"Eh?" The Department of Justice man appeared to tense in all his slender length. "You mean you've some definite word?"

For a single instant Dual appeared to hesitate and then he answered, "Since my friend Glace brought me her letter she has appealed to me for aid."

"Appealed?" Haddon caught up his meaning quickly. "Then you've had a message or something. She's wired you. I say, sir—"

"Mrs. Garston appealed to me in person," Dual replied.

"In person—" Haddon parroted once more while I felt my heart skip a beat and heard Bryce catch his breath in a rasping whisper.

And Dual went on, "The woman herself, Mr. Haddon, her intelligence, not her body—here in this room. There are means whereby the intelligence may project itself to a distance if the need requires. I mention it now only because of the reason that in the further course of this matter you may again be brought face to face with some such thing—because in this matter we are dealing, and shall deal, with phenomena somewhat above the every-day commonly accepted plane. That Lotis Garston has been present within this room, despite the fact that her body was lying in a frame structure somewhere east of the Rio Grande; that she asked for and was promised my support and assistance in the struggle now beginning, is something I can do no more than assert and ask you to believe."

Haddon stared. As Semi paused his expression was that of a man in a daze. His eyes were wide both of lid and pupil, and I had the impression that his jaw sagged a trifle, just before he pulled himself up sharply and laughed. "You don't need to do any more than that, Mr. Dual. Your assertion is enough, though the Lord knows this is getting beyond my depths."

And suddenly Jim broke out in a question. "If you promised her help, does that mean we're going out there?"

Dual turned his glance upon him. He smiled slightly. "You and Gordon, my friend, if you desire."

"If!" Jim sat up and puffed out his mustache. "If—say, I'm Irish, and I believe in banshees and th' little people, an' I never slough a fight even if I have to cross clubs with th' old Nick himself. I'm enlistin' for th' war right now. When do we start?"

"On the first through train in the morning," Semi told him. "Henri will arrange for the tickets."

It was all cut and dried, it seemed—all settled. I shrugged my shoulders and got up. I didn't know just what had happened since I had been up here before, but I fancied it must have been something like the events of the night when Connie, my wife, had sat beside Lotis's body, from which all consciousness seemed to have departed; the night before Georges Pitrininski was taken, when the girl who had married Edward Garston had sought to learn the plans of the Mongol we were fighting. Whatever it was, it had seemingly been enough.

"At that rate," I said, "Jim and I had better get back to the office and arrange to leave it and then get ready for the trip."

"I say—" Haddon also rose to his feet. "If I won't intrude—"

"By no means," Semi accepted, smiling. "Henri shall make five reservations."

"Five?" Bryce glanced about as though mentally counting.

"Five, yes, Mr. Bryce, I think. Mr. Haddon, shall we speak more at length concerning this matter?"

"Quite so," said Haddon and resumed his seat.

"We meet at the train?" I suggested.

"At the train," Dual assented, and Jim and I left.

We returned to our office and plunged into a rather frenzied consultation with Miss Newell, our confidential secretary and clerk. In substance our directions were simply to refuse all new business until such time as we should return from this most amazing trip.

It was poor business policy, of course, and I could see that Nellie was puzzled, but as a matter of fact, neither Jim nor I had any intention of remaining behind. He had already announced his intention of go-

ing, and I was resolved that I wouldn't be left.

"I suppose he's taking Henri, too," Jim remarked as we finally put on our hats and left the office and were waiting for a cage. "Him an' you an' me an' Haddon makes four—an' th' Frenchman would make five."

"Quite likely," I returned without any real feeling of interest in the matter. "Why not?"

"Oh, no reason, I guess," Jim grunted, and made no further comment until we were in the street. Then, "See you at th' train," he advised, and swung off in the sidewalk traffic toward his rooms.

I caught a car and rode out to my home, arriving there something before five o'clock.

I opened the door and closed it.

"Gordon!" I heard the voice of my wife.

"Yes," I answered and turned into the living-room on my right.

She was standing in the middle of the floor and it struck me there was something tense in her posture, and that her face was unwontedly white; that her blue eyes were wide and staring, like those of one suddenly wakened. The thought was helped out by a tumbled pillow and a soft slumber robe, trailing down from the living-room couch.

"Hello!" I said. "Were you asleep?"

Her voice came scanning. "I—I don't know—whether I was—or not."

"You don't know—" I began, and took a step toward her. "See here, Connie, what's the matter?"

"Nothing. You're home early, aren't you?"

"Yes," I nodded. "I've got to pack. Dual and I are going on a trip in the morning."

"Dual!" she cried, and was upon me in a flash, her fingers gripping my arm. "Gordon—wait—where are you going with him? Quick!"

"Why—I—don't know the exact locality," I replied nervously. "But it's some place down Southwest, near the border."

For a moment she said nothing, and then in little more than a whisper, "It's about Lotis—isn't it, Gordon?"

"Why—yes," I actually stammered. "As it happens it is, but how did you know? See here, Connie—"

"Wait," she said again and knit her brows. "She's in trouble, Gordon?"

I nodded.

"Yes, she's evidently in trouble. But—Connie."

"I know," she said again in almost inaudible fashion. "She's been here. She told me. I wasn't asleep. I didn't dream it. I've been trying for the past two hours to make up my mind whether it was a dream or not—but it wasn't. It—it was something like that night in the tower."

"What was?" I caught hold of her by the shoulders. "Connie—what are you talking about? Good God!"

"Lotis," she said, her eyes still wide and staring. "Gordon, she came here this afternoon. I had laid down to take a nap and I was just dropping off; all at once I saw her as plainly as I ever saw her in my life. It wasn't like anything imagined. I saw her as plainly as if she had been before me in the flesh. She came in and stood beside me there on the couch, and I sat up and she told me that she was in trouble; that she was afraid for her husband's life; such a strange, strange tale about things out there on that land her father left her; about the place being full of Otho Khan's people and how he was planning to wreck the world; that he had offered to make her Queen of the Earth if she would work with, instead of against, him, and how she had refused and how that meant war between them.

"Then she told me how the Master—you know that's what she always called Semi Dual—had promised to help her and how she was going back to fight Otho Khan until either he or she was destroyed, only, and she smiled in such a terrible way, Gordon, she said she thought that before it was ended Erlik would certainly seize upon Otho's soul. Then she said such a strange thing. She said '*Aie*—Otho Khan, the Tartar tool of the devil, shall not grease his toug with the blood of Garston or Garston's child.' She said it, Gordon; she said it just like that. What do you think she meant?"

"God knows," I said.

"Nor I," Connie went on. "But she said it, and I never heard the word 'toug'

before in all my life. I don't know what it means. But I heard her say it, standing there beside my couch while I sat upon it, just as I found myself sitting bolt upright after she left. And now you come and tell me you are going to her with Mr. Dual."

I nodded again. I felt myself shaken, caught up, whirled around in the grip of unnameable forces, unnameable things, caught and swept on in an irresistible current. Lotis had been here. I no longer doubted. She had come after she had seen Dual, and left in Connie's memory the sound of a meaningless word. She had come here, to my wife, who had fought the fight with us in the tower—that fight wherein we had wrested Lotis from Otho Khan's unclean control and given her back to the normal world of men and women. And no matter how, by means of what power she had done it, what Connie had heard and seen had been no dream. It had been some handling of that force, that undreamed energy which seemed to have seized upon us all as pawns to the end of its purpose.

"Dual and Jim, and I and Haddon?" I said a bit hoarsely.

"Haddon! The government man you've told me of?" my wife questioned.

"Yes."

And suddenly she tore loose from me, drew back a step and flung up her arms. She tilted back her head.

"The government man! A government agent. It is proof, Gordon! Proof as much as that word she used. They plan to wreck the nation, the world; to seize on the minds of men and destroy them, and the government is moving. I am going with you!" she cried.

"You," I began, and paused.

Of what use, I asked myself, were words. Connie's posture, her expression, her words in their intonation, were exalted, and already she had passed with us all, save Haddon, through this selfsame fire. She had been tested, tried, and—

All at once it seemed to me that I saw clearly why Dual had set the number of the morrow's reservations for our party at five. I looked into my wife's purpose-widened eyes and wondered if Lotis had really told him she was coming to Connie before she left him.

Some way, unbelievable as it all seemed, I felt that she had.

**(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)**

# Fog Bound

by Jack Bechdolt

CORA BANNON crouched low, leveling her rifle barrel across the twisting branch of a great madrone tree.

Her black eyes, peering along the barrel, narrowed as they sought to pierce the mystery of the sea fog over Diamond Island.

There was little enough for the eye to see, the great, billowing, yellowish clouds of mist that rolled in from the Pacific and turned daylight to a murk; the dimmed outlines of a few rocks, marking the brink of a sharp descent from the bluff to the beach;

the madrone trunk beside her, its rich red bark blotched with yellow scars.

Drops of water glistened in Cora Bannon's red hair and lay in the folds of her blue flannel shirt and short, serviceable skirt of khaki. The ground she knelt upon was wet with mist and none too comfortable, but she did not mind that. A girl who lived alone on Diamond Island, out in the straits that lead to the Pacific, working the little truck ranch her father had left her, managing her own affairs with Western independence, had little enough to fear from such discomfort.

What she did fear was the thing the fog hid.

Down there on the beach of her island something moved cautiously. She could hear the clatter of a dislodged pebble; the splash of feet through a tidal pool.

Another woman, knowing that Axel Horst, the trap pirate, the murderer of a fish trap watchman at Anacortes, the fugitive who had shot down a policeman at Townsend in his dash for freedom, was lurking there behind the curtain, alone with her on a lonely island, might have given him all the distance possible. Cora Bannon, following up her discovery, tracked him down.

There was a reward for the capture of Axel Horst, dead or alive. Cora Bannon could use that reward, but reward or not, she was set on making the capture of a man who had taken human life, who menaced the safety of that island community, who roamed apparently at will defying the posses hunting him and making his name a terror to peaceful, law-abiding folk.

Not for nothing was Cora Bannon red-haired.

All the independence, initiative and pugnacity so often ascribed to flaming hair—and so often mistakenly ascribed—she possessed. And with it the courage of a Western girl who could manage her own affairs.

A freshet of pebbles, dislodged by human foot, rattled near at hand.

Dim in the mist, the shadow of a man topped the bank, among the boulders.

"That's quite close enough!" Cora Bannon called sharply. "Stop! Right where you are. Hands up. Higher! I know how to use a gun, Axel Horst!"

She rose from her shelter, the rifle barrel trained on the wraith in the mist. She approached until the weapon touched her prisoner's chest.

His hands were held high.

In the fog he loomed down a big man, broad of shoulder, deep of chest. He wore no hat and his disheveled hair and a rough growth of beard gave him a savage look. The eyes, small and deep-set, glared down at Cora Bannon.

The prisoner spoke in a hoarse growl.

"You're crazy, girl! Put up that gun—"

"Not crazy enough to do that, Horst—"

"Horst nothing! My name's Brown—Ed Brown. Belong to the United Canners' outfit at Dungeness. Been chasing this Axel Horst myself, the last ten days."

Cora Bannon smiled her scorn.

"I heard you were a shrewd dodger," she said. "But you'll have to think up a better one than that—"

"I'll show you my deputy's badge—"

"Keep those hands higher!" Cora's voice rang hard as steel at the threatening gesture.

"All right! Wait and see!"

The prisoner whistled a low call.

"Hello!" answered a cautious voice below the cut bank.

"Come up here, Kane!"

A moment Cora wavered with surprise. Then, "Come carefully, whoever you are," she called sharply. "I know how to use this gun."

A grunt of surprise answered. Another man materialized from the fog, came closer warily, took in the situation and gaped with open mouth.

"My gosh if it ain't Miss Bannon!" the newcomer whispered.

"Tell her who I am," commanded the prisoner.

"Tell me who you are first, and keep your hands up while you do it." Cora Bannon's amendment had a tone that meant business.

"Say, you'd ought to remember me," the second man remonstrated eagerly. "Take a good look! I'm Kane, Ralph

Kane of Klaxon Island. Met you at the dance to Friday Harbor last Christmas. Take a good luck, Miss Bannon!"

Cora Bannon looked and nodded.

"Yes, you are Ralph Kane. But this man—"

"This man's Brown, Ed Brown," Kane declared eagerly. "Sure he is, Miss Bannon! Comes from the United outfit at Dungeness. Deputized to hunt down Axel Horst. Why, I been with him pretty nearly two days now; I'd ought to know. Came to my ranch two days ago, showed me his credentials and we've been out with my skiff since, combing the islands. Been in touch with the rest of the boys right along! He's Ed Brown all right!"

"He answers the description of Axel Horst!"

"So do a lot of men, in a general way, Miss Cora! No, no, you got the wrong pig by the ear this time. Better drop the gun."

Cora Bannon hesitated, lowered her rifle and sighed. "I apologise, Mr. Brown."

Her recent prisoner grunted. "You'd better be more careful with that gun," he growled hoarsely. "All this fuss and noise, like's not you've scared off our man now—"

"Is he here, on Diamond?"

"He's here," Kane answered. "Near by, right now. Brown and I got track of him. And we're going to get him, too!"

"Better be about it," Brown suggested curtly.

"I'll help," Cora volunteered.

"No." Brown said it decisively. "A woman with a gun!" he added scornfully. Cora felt herself blush to the roots of her red hair.

"Let her," Kane urged. "She's a good shot. I know! And she's got pluck—"

"She'll kill one of us before she's through. Besides, the reward—"

"It's her island," Kane argued with more heart than logic. "Besides, another hand won't be any too much against Horst."

Brown growled something in his throat.

"All right," he nodded to Cora. "Our man's below, along the beach somewhere close. Follow us along the top of the cut bank here, and if he comes your way shoot first and talk about it later. Come on, Kane."

With Kane, Brown disappeared in the fog. Cora Bannon, left alone, felt decidedly nettled at the man. His scorn of her was so patent. But there was work to do, dangerous work, a man hunt. She could not afford to consider hurt dignity at this moment.

Carefully, craftily, so that she made no sound, she followed along the top of the cut bank, peering, listening, waiting some sign of the pursuit.

The yellow fog rolled thick about her. The lap of a gentle swell talked on the shingle below. Somewhere close by a sea gull cried harshly in the mist and startled her.

Echoing that cry came pistol shots, two close together. Then a scuffle on the beach, noise of a man running, another shot and the voice of Brown, "Got him!"

Cora Bannon flung herself recklessly down the steep bank, scrambled over barnacled rocks and splashed through pools, guided by the voices of Kane and Brown. She came upon them bending over a third man who lay in a huddle.

"Clipped him along the scalp," Brown was saying. "Knocked him silly. Damn shame I didn't aim a mite lower!"

The smug satisfaction of the hunter who has made a difficult wing shot was in that purring tone.

Cora Bannon, peering down at the huddle she knew to be a man, a man badly hurt at that, wanted to cry her protest at Brown's callousness.

Kane said, "He's breathing all right. We'd better get him some place where we can see how bad he's hit."

"First let's see his face." Brown seized the prostrate man and rolled him face up, disregarding Kane's anxious, "Easy there, the man's hurt."

"Yep," said Brown, well satisfied. "It's him. C'm' here, Miss; there's your Axel Horst. Maybe you'll remember him this time, eh?"

Cora Bannon peered at the upturned face, gone white and waxlike in its frame of unshaven cheek and jaw. A trickle of red came from the scalp.

She threw aside her rifle, knelt in the sand and with moistened handkerchief tried to stanch the wound.

"Hell!" growled the deputy, Brown. "Coddling a man-killer. That's a woman for you!"

Cora Bannon returned the sneering glance and her black eyes snapped.

"Whoever he is, he's a human being. And he's hurt. I don't treat humans like wild animals, Brown!"

## II.

THE ranch-house on Diamond Island had not changed greatly since the death of Eric Bannon two years ago. Such changes as there were bore silent witness to a woman's presence.

A one story, two-room structure, most of its space was devoted to a combination kitchen, dining and living room with a bunk built against one wall where a visitor might sleep. Curtained from this was the smaller room, Cora Bannon's own.

In the corner of the big room was the cooking stove and kitchen table, pots and pans and pails. In its center another table, built of trimmed forest wood and thick planks. A few home-made easy chairs, calico curtains at the windows, a suggestion of island life in dried starfish, a shark's jaws, boat's gear and fishing tackle. The calico curtains, bright and rather pretty, nasturtiums peering in at windows, an air of cleanliness unusual for such a house. Here the woman's touch showed most.

Laid on the bunk that was built against the wall was the man Brown had brought down, their prisoner, Axel Horst. Kane and Cora, insistent, won their point and brought him to this shelter for attention. Brown gave in after protest.

"If he does die it's not half he deserves," Brown insisted. "Why all this fool trouble about a killer? Both of you make me sick!"

Cora washed the wound where the bullet had creased the man's scalp. Kane helped her make a bandage. Brown sprawled in a chair, his glittering little eyes following their movements, a sneer on his lips.

"Give me his clothes," Brown directed as they worked. "Let's see what he's got on him."

Presently he gave a triumphant chuckle and held aloft several objects.

"Look here, if you don't think we got Horst this time! Here's your proof! Found in his own pockets."

A crumpled letter bearing Horst's name, a cheap knife with the bandit's initials, more incriminating still the badge and papers of Hanna, the policeman Horst had shot in Townsend.

"And yet you go babying him with bandages and doctoring," Brown sneered. "Letting honest men that capture him suffer for a bite to eat and hot coffee."

Cora answered only with a look that spoke her contempt for him.

Kane remonstrated again. "Hell, Brown, it ain't fair to let him die if we can stop it!"

"And why not? He'll be hanged if you don't. Better to let him die now if he wants to!"

Through it all their prisoner lay inert, breathing heavily.

Cora got the deputies coffee and food.

"Now," said Brown, better satisfied as he wolfed down doughnuts, "what we'll do is this. Kane, you borrow this girl's launch—you got a launch, ain't you? All right, run down to Friday Harbor and fetch Sheriff Nat Coons. Me, I'll stay and watch our man here, and rest up a bit. What say?"

"Ready," Kane answered promptly. "I can take the launch, Miss Bannon? All we got's the skiff we rowed over in—"

"Yes," Cora agreed doubtfully. She followed Kane from the house, vaguely dissatisfied with the arrangement. She was of half a mind to go with him, but the thought of the wounded man, left to Brown's sole attentions, made her pause. The man might need help and little use his looking to Brown for help!

She wanted to discuss this with Kane, whom she trusted by instinct, by their brief former acquaintance and by his reputation in the Island community. She started to speak of it only to find Brown slouching behind them.

"You might tell Nat Coons if he wants

his prisoner on the hoof he'd better fetch along a doctor," Brown grinned. "Meantime he's getting a mother's fond care!"

Cora turned on her heel and went back to the ranch-house.

The prisoner lay quiet, as they had left him, a man of wax except for his labored breathing. Through the fog she heard the launch engine start and knew Kane had left. Presently the door opened, Brown slouched in heavily and sprawled again in the big chair. Cora ignored him.

The fog swirled thick outside, masking Diamond Island. Shreds of it sifted into the room, gray in the uncanny yellow twilight. The air had a chill, clammy touch like a dead hand. A hush was on everything, the only sound the half strangled breathing of the unconscious man, the drip-drip of moisture from the eaves, the raucous crying of gulls.

Cora picked up a half finished piece of knitting and busied her fingers. Her back was turned on the deputy.

Brown, slouching, his legs straight before him, watched the sheen of her hair, the one live thing in the quiet shanty; studied the contour of her cheek, childishly rounded; studied the girlish curve of shoulder and breast revealed by the clinging flannel shirt, and thought slowly, with eyes brightening.

Brown's clenched fist, smashing against the table top, startled Cora like a pistol shot.

He was on his feet, leaning across the table, his breath hot against her cheek.

"Look here," he growled huskily, "hate me, don't you, my fine young lady?"

## III.

Cora Bannon drew away hastily, annoyed by the man's nearness; frightened by his look.

As promptly, Brown leaned closer.

"Hate me, huh? You'll spill a lot of tears and slush about a man-killer that gets shot down, but you can't see any good in an honest man doing his duty. Oh, no! Well, hell, I don't care how you feel it, my girl! No, I'm funny that way; I don't care what any woman thinks of me."

Brown grinned without mirth, showing teeth that gleamed in the black frame of unshaved beard.

Cora, risen from her chair, turned to face him squarely. "You're a very good guesser," she said coldly. "Whatever you may be as a deputy sheriff, I'm not mad about you as company. Suppose you sit down again where you were and keep your conversation to yourself."

Her rifle stood in a corner. Now she wished vainly she had left it nearer at hand. There was that in Brown's manner—

Brown guessed her thoughts and laughed.

"You can't reach that gun of yours. I could shoot you down before you took two steps, or, I could—"

His hand shot across the table and gripped her arm. The fingers bit deep into her soft flesh.

Brown moved quickly around the end of the table until he held her close against him.

Though the pain of his grip burned hot, the red-haired girl made no outcry.

Her black eyes were wide as they met Brown's look of triumph. Her lips parted with her hurried breathing and her cheeks were pale under their tan. But she was unafraid.

"No," Brown repeated savagely, "I don't give a damn what any woman thinks of me. When I see a girl I fancy I take her—like this!"

His savage arms swept her close against him, half smothered by his rough coat, giddy, nauseated, helpless.

"Before I go," Brown said thickly. "I guess I'll have to show you just what I think—of—your—sort. Beginning—like—this—"

His rough hand cupped her chin, forcing back her head. His face bent closer, the small eyes burning red. His thick lips branded her flesh—

She screamed.

## IV.

The shock of a man's weight, sent flying from across the room, struck the struggling pair like a torpedo.

And like a torpedo exploding was the

fury of the attack that landed on the deputy's shoulders.

He was spun about and Cora Bannon, released suddenly, went staggering.

At her feet two men were fighting, fighting with the fury of tigers. A glance at the empty bunk against the wall, its blankets sent awry, told her who had brought down the deputy.

The planks drummed with the impact of their bodies. The shack rocked with the struggle.

Brown had come down on his back. The bandit, quick as a cat, rolled from under him and flung himself flat, pinning Brown to the floor.

Cora heard the solid *tunk* of Brown's skull meeting the planks and a horrid, guilty thrill of joy shivered through her veins.

As suddenly the situation reversed itself. Brown's teeth met in his opponent's wrist, a strangling cry of rage and pain, a volcanic upheaval of bodies and they rolled.

A chair went crashing from their path.

They struck the wall and a dozen loose objects rattled down.

The girl, crouching, peering in the gray light, was held fascinated by her fears and her excitement.

Brown was on top now, Horst pinned fast in the angle of floor and wall.

The deputy's hard fists rose and struck at the bandit's face; rose and aimed again for its white mark.

Then Cora Bannon, without reason or knowledge that she did it, took a hand in the fight.

Her rifle was in her hands, how she knew not. Grasping its barrel she raised the butt and aimed a blow, a blow meant for Brown. Her only object was to halt that murdering fist—and she did!

The rifle butt struck—not on Brown's arm, but meeting his skull squarely.

Brown grunted, sagged wearily and sprawled, a heavy weight across his man.

Without reason still, guided only by impulse, Cora tugged at the deputy's limp weight, rolling him off the under man. Her arms went beneath Axel Horst's shoulders and she dragged him free.

The prisoner sat up, blinking, looking dizzily at the limp deputy, at the red-haired girl who saved his life, about the dim, disrupted little cabin.

His hand went to his head, felt the bandage there and fumbled in its folds. He stared at Cora Bannon.

He saw a red-haired Amazon, the disheveled locks wild about her shoulders, her dress dangling, one sleeve by a thread, torn wide at the bosom, an Amazon who returned his look helpless in the puzzlement of the moment.

The minute noises, reminders of the stillness and the loneliness of Diamond Island, stole back into the room—drip of moisture off the eaves, the muffled cry of gulls lost in the fog.

And succeeding these, another sound, the *pop-a-pop-pop* of a launch nearing the beach.

The girl spoke suddenly. "That's my launch—coming back! It's Kane—and the sheriff, coming to get you! In a minute they'll be here and—" she stared about desperately—"they'll find—this! What can we do? What *can* we do?"

The prisoner shook his head weakly.

"Here!" cried Cora, in action again, "give me a hand with him! Inside, in the bed room. They must not find him—until—you get away!"

## V.

The prisoner, fumbling weakly at his bandaged head, stared perplexedly at Cora Bannon. His eyes were startling blue.

"Me—get away?" he repeatedly slowly.

Cora, panting with her heavy burden, cried sharply, seeking to rouse him. "Yes. The sheriff's coming. Is here! You haven't time to waste!"

"He—attacked—you—" The words were given one at a time, with an intense effort at recollection; at coherence. The speaker swayed unsteadily, holding his head.

"And you saved me from him. That's why—if you slip out the back way, hide in the fog, later I can help you. Are you listening, Horst! Horst! Oh—"

Axel Horst sighed gently and fell back, unconscious—done by the hard fight.

A moment Cora stared hopelessly, then with redoubled energy dragged Brown's heavy body within the curtained room, returned and dragged the prisoner after him.

Flushed and breathless she reached the door in time to answer the sheriff's heavy knock.

"Horst!" she panted, confronting the men Kane had brought in the launch. "He got away. Brown—is out—after him. If you—hurry—"

"Got away? How? Which way? Spread out, you boys, and careful in this fog! Now, Miss Bannon, let's have it all."

Sheriff Nat Coons remained, confronting Cora. He pushed into the room and reluctantly she gave way before him.

The sheriff's quick eye took in the confusion of chairs overturned, scattered articles, the blankets thrown wild from the wall bunk.

"He got away," Cora Bannon repeated, her wits racing to fit the story to the evidence. "He had been wounded, by your deputy, Brown. We thought him unconscious. Brown was sitting there, in that chair—talking to me. Horst must have recovered consciousness. He had got as far as the door there, that curtained one, when Brown sprang up. They fought, but Horst got loose. Brown went after him."

Sheriff Nat Coons questioned sharply; made her repeat the details, nodding his head thoughtfully. The story had its own relish for him—another sensational chapter in the sensational story of Axel Horst, the story in which Sheriff Coons was figuring as a newspaper hero.

The sheriff was greedy for details. There were eager city newspaper reporters waiting his return to Friday Harbor. His men, combing Diamond Island, undoubtedly would bring in Horst. So he stopped to ask questions.

And Cora Bannon lied while her heart raced as though it would suffocate her at thought of the man she was shielding. She had struck down an officer of the law. She was aiding a law-breaker—a man-killer—to escape. Some time soon when she had time to think again, she knew there was coming a dreadful hour when her guilt would face her; when the thing she had done on impulse would cry out in shameful accusation. Just now she lied with a readiness born of desperation.

"He's a bad one!" cried Sheriff Coons, with good appetite for the situation. "A bad lot. But we'll get him now. Well, well, Miss Bannon, I guess you were scared, eh? So he got out this way? Through that room, eh?"

"Yes," Cora nodded and as quickly amended, "*No. Not that way!*"

"Eh, what—"

"I mean that—that I was too frightened, too confused—"

"Suppose we take a look." Sheriff Coons pushed by her, nearing the flimsy curtain that hid her guilt.

"No, no, please I—I'm sure it was the front door. Let me show you—"

"Upset. Upset bad in her mind. Poor girl!" thought Sheriff Coons. Aloud he said, "We'll just take a peek. No harm—in—that—"

Silence as he peered through the lifted curtain.

Cora Bannon had frozen rigid where she stood, not even breathing.

In the doorway stood the sheriff, peering sharply. She saw his hand push back his coat, seeking the ready pistol in its holster. Then he went into the room and the curtain dropped behind him.

Drawn by a dread fascination Cora Bannon followed; peered within.

The room, except for Sheriff Coons, was empty of human occupants.

"Hm-m-m!" said the sheriff thoughtfully. "Well, well! Out the back way, as you say. Out there in the fog, I reckon."

## VI.

Sheriff Nat Coons hurried off to direct his posse, leaving Cora Bannon to face unpleasant thoughts.

She leaned weakly against the curtained doorway, her eyes exploring the room so recently emptied, much as if she expected second sight would produce the missing men.

"A nice mess you've made," Cora said to herself, speaking with bitter honesty. And then, "When Coons finds out I sup-

pose they can put me in—in jail for it! Striking a deputy; letting a murderer escape! A mess! Oh, Lord, what a mess!"

Her thoughts bustled back to the crowded half hour so recently passed into history.

"I hit him hard," she mused. "Good and plenty!" In spite of her conscience she smiled. "And he got what was coming to him. Horst saved me, though. Except for him, I—" She shuddered and declared suddenly with new conviction, "I don't care! Brown's a beast. It's not my fault, it's his. As for Horst I—I'm glad he got away. Even if he is all they say of him!"

She puzzled out the mystery of their disappearance. Horst had recovered quickly. Nor could Brown have been so badly hurt. And Brown had gone after Horst. Yes, that would be the way of it!

Horst undoubtedly would go after the skiff that had brought Kane and Brown to Diamond Island. That would be close by the beach where Brown had shot down his prisoner.

Cora realized in a flash that this knowledge was exclusively hers. Coons and his men were hunting at random.

She owed something to the law. If she could recapture the bandit before he found the skiff that might atone for the mischief she had done.

And action promised forgetfulness!

Cora Bannon seized her rifle and started.

She had reached the madrone tree where first she met Brown when the thick fog produced voices, men talking on the beach below.

"Got you, Horst!" The shout held a grim triumph. "Now you stick up those hands and keep 'em there. Figured on another get away, didn't you?"

Then the scuffle of feet on loose gravel, heavy breathing, an inarticulate word or two and a ringing, "Steady! I said, keep those hands up."

Cora's rifle ripped the fog with three rapid shots, signal to Sheriff Coons and his men. Then she leaped down the bank.

The two men faced each other beside a skiff, beached above the tide line. But it was Brown whose hands were in the air and Horst who held the gun on him.

Cora Bannon stared, held fascinated by surprise.

The blue-eyed fugitive stared. Brown gaped, but he recovered from surprise first.

"Hell!" Brown growled. "Going to let him get away again, red-head?"

Cora hesitated. The blue-eyed man laughed shortly. "Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere. Doesn't look like it, does it?"

Brown's hoarse voice entreated earnestly, "Do something! You got a gun! You know this man is Axel Horst—"

"That's a lie." The fugitive's answer was cool. "You tried that trick once too often, Horst. But I don't mind telling you who I am. I'm Tom Hanna, brother of the man you shot in Townsend, and I swore I'd get you for that. Came after you alone and I got you, too! You can fool Ralph Kane, but you can't fool me, because I've seen you before—"

"He's lying, I tell you!" The deputy's voice became a shout. "Do something. Quick, before he gets away! Oh, for the love of God—"

Cora stared from one to the other; from the blue-eyed man who called himself Hanna to the heavy-set one who called himself Brown. Which should she believe? Which should she help?

"You are Horst," she accused the blue-eyed man. "I saw your letters and your knife—"

"Planted in my clothes by him while I lay in that bunk watching him—"

"Another lie," Brown shouted. "Don't let him get away, you little fool!"

The voices of Nat Coons's men coming and tramp of their hurried feet. Cora Bannon walked suddenly to the blue-eyed man, the recent prisoner. She turned her rifle barrel against the man Brown.

"I don't care if you are Horst," she whispered fiercely. "Take the skiff. Quick! The fog will hide you—and I'll hold Coons's men off until you get away!"

The answer came promptly, "Thanks, I'll stay where I am. And so will our friend Horst."

Axel Horst, a prisoner now, identified beyond a doubt, stripped of his stolen sheriff's badge, stripped of his alias of Brown, was

hustled to the sheriff's launch. The elusive killer, waiting his chance to leave the country, had doubled once too often and chance had brought him face to face with men who knew him.

A badly surprised man was Ralph Kane of Klaxon Island when his friend Brown wore the manacles. To all who would listen he told and re-told the story of the trick that Horst had played on him, protesting to the world that slickness like that would fool the most astute.

But a man even more puzzled was Tom Hanna, who, having avenged a brother, lingered now to question Cora Bannon.

"You thought me Horst?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"And yet you bound my wounds. You were kind to me. Oh, I was not unconscious all the time I lay in that bunk! You were kind to me!"

Cora colored. "I would have been to Brown," she said, on the defensive now. "To any man who is hurt—"

"And yet, on the beach there, when Coons was coming, you thought me Horst still. You had your choice of helping two men—and in spite of what you believed me to be, you choose to offer me your help!"

Cora colored more. "I suppose it does seem queer!"

"Queer! It was splendid. Because you chose right. What I don't make out, is how you did it, when the evidence was all against me!"

Cora Bannon smiled and shook her head. "I don't know," she confessed. "I don't believe you'd ever understand. It was just because—" With a shrug she confessed her helplessness to put it into words.

Voices called Tom Hanna, impatient voices summoning him to the launch.

"I've got to go," he said reluctantly. "Got to hurry. But I'm coming back—to get the answer to that riddle."

What was the answer? Cora Bannon thought of one while she watched the sheriff's launch vanish in the fog. A simple answer without rime or reason. And yet to her, her senseless answer made sense.

She wondered what Tom Hanna would make of it if she answered truthfully, "Because you have blue eyes!"

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# THE CALL

DO you ever have a longin' to get out an' buck the trail,
An' to face the crashin' lightnin' an' the thunder an' the gale?
Not fer no partic'lar reason, but to give the world the laugh,
An' to show the roarin' elyments you still can stand the gaff.

Don't you ever feel a yearnin' jest to try your luck again
Down the rippin', plungin' rapids with a bunch o' reg'lar men?
Don't you ever sorta hanker fer a rough an' risky trip,
Jest to prove you're still a livin' an' you haven't lost yer grip?

Can't you hear the woods a callin' fer to have another try
Sleepin' out beneath the spruces with a roof of moon-lit sky,
With the wind a sorta singin' through the branches overhead
An' yer fire a gaily crackin' an' yer pipe a glowin' red?

Don't you often get to feelin' sorta cramped an' useless there,
Makin' figgers while you shine yer pants upon an office chair?
Don't you yearn to get acquainted once again with Life an' God?
If you don't then Heaven help you, fer you're dyin' in yer pod.

*Earl H. Emmons.*

# Trailing Back

## Part II

by Charles Alden Seltzer

**Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Drag Harlan," etc.**

### WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

LARRY REDMOND has been out of prison a little more than a year, after serving two years for alleged manslaughter. Since his release he has devoted his time to exercising his trigger finger, preparatory to killing Mint Moyer, who framed him up and sent him to jail. Larry knew too much about Moyer for the latter's safety. He knew his name was really Egan, and that he had killed the rightful Mint Moyer and taken his place. He suspected that he had killed Moyer's father as well, and he knew beyond doubt that he had murdered Owens, a rancher. When Larry goes to Moyer's ranch the latter has gone to Dry Bottom. Larry remains at the ranch-house and sends two of Moyer's tools to bring him back—Sneddon and Craim. Then he enters the kitchen to get something to eat and is confronted by a young woman who introduces herself as Moyer's sister, Martha. Larry knows then that the impostor is planning to trick the girl, who he discovers is ignorant of the man's past, having been away from home for many years. Martha knows of Larry from her brother, who has called him a horse thief. But, looking at him, she cannot believe him guilty. When she asks him about himself he tells her simply that he was framed up by her brother, but he knows that he cannot prove to her that Moyer is an impostor. Neither, he decides, can he kill Moyer while she calls him brother. His vengeance must be postponed, and he must get her away from the ranch. Shocked by what Larry has said of Moyer, the girl sits with bowed head, expecting her brother's return at any minute and dreading the tragedy of a meeting between the men.

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### CHAPTER VII.

#### BROTHERLY LOVE.

MARTHA heard the outside door swing open, creaking slightly. She heard Redmond step outside, heard him softly close the door. She dropped her hands to her sides and sat tense, listening for further sounds.

None reached her ears. A heavy silence settled, seemed to engulf her.

Redmond's story had shocked her inexpressibly. Truth had been in the man's eyes while he had been telling the story of her brother's trickery; truth had been in his voice.

She believed Redmond. With her first glance at him as he had stood beside the stove when she had entered the kitchen door she had been impressed with his manliness. His subsequent attitude toward her, his quiet consideration, and his steady courtesy—rough but sincere—had affected her. Had he been violent, had he betrayed passion, she might have doubted, might have felt that there had been some mistake. But Redmond's manner of questioning her—the cold, calculating expression of his eyes, the

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atmosphere of restraint that had seemed to surround him since her discovery of him in the kitchen—made the possibility of error, on his part, remote and improbable. He seemed to have considered well, seemed to be acting with caution, slowly and deliberately.

For a few minutes following the closing of the outside door Martha sat listening. Then, obeying an impulse, she got up, blew out the light on the center-table near her, and ran to the bracket lamp in the kitchen. She also extinguished that light, after which she moved swiftly to one of the kitchen windows. She saw Redmond at the corral fence, where he had tied his horse. His back was toward her, but in the clear moonlight she had no difficulty in recognizing him.

She watched him breathlessly. He had said he intended to "hang around" until her brother came; and noting that he had unhitched the horse, she was assailed with a fear that he had changed his mind and intended to ride to Dry Bottom in search of her brother. She remembered she had told him that she had ridden to Dry Bottom that morning with Mint.

Despite Redmond's self-control when speaking of her brother—in spite of his quietness and his deliberation and the lack of passion in his eyes—she was convinced that he meant to kill. When leaving her he had told her that he meant to have a talk with her brother in an effort to straighten things out; and he had said: "Things will come out all right—for you."

It was the significance that had been attached to the "for you" that had aroused her to a conviction of the sinister threat of his presence; she could not mistake the emphasis he had placed upon those two words.

Her face was pale, but there was a resolute look in her eyes as she watched Redmond.

He did not mount his horse, but led him down along the corral fence. Thus she knew that he did not intend to go far. She lost sight of him for a few minutes, as he passed behind some buildings, still leading the horse; and then she saw him again, skirting the edge of a little wood, westward. Then suddenly, while she still watched, he vanished.

Still cautious, she thought with a smile that was rather grim. He was taking no chances. He expected Mint to return during the night, and he intended to camp in the timber so that Mint could not surprise him. If he meditated no evil he would have stayed in the house.

If Mint had done the things Redmond had accused him of doing, she could understand how Redmond must feel toward him. Therefore she could find no blame in her heart for Redmond. He was merely responding to a primitive impulse to seek justice in his own way.

However, she could not permit him to kill Mint. No matter what Mint had done, she could not stand idly by and see him murdered. Redmond must lack knowledge of the depth of blood loyalty if he believed she would do that.

It was not that she loved Mint. She had expected to love him; she had wanted to. But loving Mint had been impossible.

From the first there had been something about Mint that had repulsed her. Loyally she had fought against the feeling, ascribing it to their long separation, to the knowledge that she had never had a definite idea of his appearance, and that she had been compelled to revise her preconceived ideas of him.

Nor had Mint treated her as a sister. That conviction had delayed the accomplishment of the ultimate and ideal intimacy of their relationship. Mint had been mysteriously aloof. He would not talk about their parents; he seemed to avoid the subject. He didn't act as a brother should act.

But she did not want him killed; she was determined that she would not allow Redmond to kill him. Mint might have his faults, but he was still her brother.

She stood at the window for a little while after Redmond's disappearance into the timber. Then, suddenly resolved that she could not endure the mental torture of waiting for Mint to come, she went into the living-room, got her hat and a light quirt, put out the light in the room in which Redmond had encountered Sneddon and

Craim, and stepped out of the door into the moonlight.

She felt that she must not wait for Mint to come—he must not come while Redmond was waiting for him. She meant to ride to Dry Bottom to warn him—or to meet him on the way if he had already started for the K Down.

She hoped to get away without Redmond seeing her, and she was thankful that she had put her horse in the stable instead of turning him into the corral, for she kept the building between her and the wood, and was certain she succeeded in entering it without attracting Redmond's attention.

She had ridden much in other days, for her home in Ohio had been in the center of a big farming country; and she had seen most of this new section of the world from horseback. Therefore the task of saddling the horse was not a difficult one, and in a few minutes from the time she had entered the stable she was leading the animal out.

She mounted from a rail of the corral fence, still keeping the stable between herself and the timber, and a little later she rode eastward.

For a time she bore slightly northward, off the trail, still mindful of the eyes that might be watching from the timber; but when she had placed a high ridge behind her she found the trail and rode it rapidly. She knew the country well, for she had ridden many times to Dry Bottom—the quaint if somewhat squalid town that sprawled over a sand flat twenty miles eastward from the K Down—and she loved every foot of the rugged landscape so well that its details were vividly impressed upon her memory.

She intended to save Mint from Redmond's vengeance—she owed that to him because he was her brother. But she was inflexibly determined that when she met Mint she would demand the truth from him—and if he had done what Redmond said he had done she would make him confess his crime to the world. That much, in simple justice, Mint owed to Redmond. But there must be no killing.

She rode into a moonlit void beyond the ridge, from behind which Redmond had watched Sneddon and Craim as they climbed the shoulder of a distant mesa. Half an hour later she was urging her horse up the big slope, elated over the thought that she had succeeded in getting away from the ranch without Redmond's knowledge.

She could not fully understand Redmond. She was aware that good and evil impulses are in eternal conflict in the heart of every one of God's creatures; and she had seen both reflected in Redmond's eyes during the evening. She felt that while Redmond yearned to be revenged upon her brother, a contrary impulse was working upon him, attempting to dissuade him.

Of the two sides of his character that had been revealed to her, she liked the gentle one best. She was certain gentleness dominated in him; that the violent passions she had seen in him were not the deep, searing character scars of the hardened taker of human life; she was sure that they merely sprang from impulses of resentment such as any man might entertain when brooding over wrongs that had been done him.

Normally, he was what she had thought him when in the kitchen he had betrayed embarrassment under her scrutiny—a big man with a good-natured boy's heart which had been embittered.

She was aware that his boyishness would not be visible to every one, however. Men would never see it, because it is not given to men to glimpse the abashed consciousness of self that illuminates a man's eyes when he meets a woman's gaze—a woman he likes.

Redmond was a man among men—she knew that. For she had glimpsed the sterner side of him; she had sensed the inflexibility of him; had divined his cold confidence in himself, his serene knowledge of his ability to give a good account of himself in any circumstances.

This far she knew Redmond—the mother instinct in her had probed him, had told her in terms that she could not mistake: "Here is a man." It was when she attempted to provide a reason for his abashment in her presence—when she gazed steadily at him—that she found herself becoming confused.

Of one thing she was certain: he had

come to the K Down to kill the man who had wronged him. She had seen a miraculous change come over him; she had seen indecision in his eyes; she had noted his astonishment when she had told him she was Moyer's sister.

It was evident he had not expected to find a sister at the K Down, and that, after discovering there was a sister, he had felt his determination waver. Later the vengeful passion had come again into his eyes, and because of it she knew he must not be permitted to meet Mint.

She rode on, against a steady, gentle breeze that pressed against her, scanning the dim plains with anxious glances, for she didn't want to miss Mint and have him go to meet the fate that she was certain awaited him at the ranch-house.

She was riding into a soundless void, into a luminous, ghostly land of interminable distances where various shades of darkness were massed in the depressions and against the distant hills; where barren ridges loomed, ragged and somber, against the pale blue of the sky.

It was the first time she had ridden the trail at night, and she discovered that objects with which she was familiar now seemed to have a different appearance. For example, a huge rock spire that arose, sentinel-like, above a stretch of broken country, south of the trail, now seemed to have been removed to another section which was entirely strange to her. Also, the spire seemed higher, bigger; it looked monstrous, solemn, inspiring her with a sudden awed apprehension.

Other landmarks seemed unfamiliar and out of place. She grew slightly confused and reined in her horse while she studied her surroundings. After a time she gave a nervous little laugh and rode forward again. When she reached a rolling ridge with a broad, level top, which at her left was strewn with some boulders of gigantic size and grotesque shape, she knew she had not lost the trail. She rode forward with renewed confidence.

After she surmounted the ridge the country east of her was disclosed, radiantly beautiful in the moonlight. It trended downward gradually—a series of low hills like swells on a sea. The trail ran through the hills, undulating, sinuous.

She was passing through a little valley when she heard a horse whinny inquiringly. Her own animal answered and, despite her restraining hand on the reins, scampered to the crest of the farther slope of the valley to a level.

She drew him down just as a man stepped from behind a huge rock beside the trail. The man came forward, chuckling.

"Seen you comin'," he said. "Thought at first you was Redmond."

It was Sneddon's voice. Martha peered intently at him in the subdued light, to make certain.

She didn't like Sneddon, but he had always been civil and respectful, and she felt a vast relief over the knowledge that she would not have to make the long ride to Dry Bottom. Redmond had told her that he had sent Sneddon and Craim after Mint, and in view of the fact that Sneddon seemed to be alone she divined that Sneddon had chosen to remain here, sending Craim on the errand.

But before Sneddon could reach her side she saw another man coming toward her over the opposite slope of the hill. The second man was Craim.

"Why," she said, astonished, "I thought Mr. Redmond had sent you—both of you—to Dry Bottom to get Mint."

"So you met Redmond," said Sneddon. He had reached her; he threw an arm over the neck of her horse and rested the other on the pommel of the saddle. "Where's Redmond now?" he asked.

"At the ranch-house."

"What's he doin'?"

"Nothing."

Craim had come up. He stepped close and peered upward at her, inquiringly, keenly, as though she were some sort of a curiosity.

"You talked with Redmond?" he asked.

"Certainly. He was in the house when I got home. I took the north trail coming back—the one Mint warned me against. But it wasn't so dangerous. But at night, I suppose—"

"What did Redmond have to say to you?" interrupted Sneddon.

She was aware of the intense interest exhibited by the two men, and she felt a pulse of vindictive satisfaction, remembering what Redmond had told her regarding their connection with the incident that had resulted in his serving a term in prison.

"About you?" she said. "I don't remember that he mentioned either of you." She told the lie deliberately because she did not want to talk with them about Redmond's charge until she threshed the matter out with Mint.

"He seemed to want Mint," she said. "He is going to wait at the ranch-house until Mint returns."

"I reckon he'll have a long wait," said Sneddon. "Mint ain't no fool. Look here," he added, eying her searchingly; "you say Redmond didn't talk any. If he didn't talk why are you headin' for Dry Bottom?"

"I thought I should not stay at the ranch to-night with Mr. Redmond there," she declared.

"That's reasonable," said Sneddon; "you shouldn't. So Redmond didn't say anything. Sure he didn't mention anything about him bein' in prison?"

"He mentioned that," she admitted. "I believe that is what he wants to see Mint about."

Sneddon watched her suspiciously.

"Thought you said he didn't talk none?" he demanded.

Sneddon's tone angered her. "I'll tell Mint what he said," she declared. "Let go of my horse, Sneddon; I'm going after Mint."

"I reckon not," said Sneddon. He had shifted his hands, and now gripped the bridle rein. There was a scowl on his face.

"You ain't goin' for Mint," he said. "If we'd wanted Mint to meet Redmond, we'd have gone after him before this. Redmond made us pull our freight from the K Down just after dusk. I reckon he told you that, or you wouldn't have said what you did.

"You'll notice we didn't go any farther than right here. Sendin' Mint back there to meet Redmond would be just the same as signin' his death warrant. Redmond would kill him for certain.

"Redmond's a he-wolf with a gun!" he went on, seeing that his words had impressed the girl. "Before he went to prison he was the slickest, fastest, nerviest gun-slinger in the country. I'm bettin' he ain't forgot his old tricks. An' he hates Mint worse than poison!"

"Why does he hate Mint?"

"Well"—Sneddon hesitated—"I reckon he hates Mint because Mint is Mint."

"Sneddon, you lie!" charged Martha. "You are trying to conceal something. Redmond told me Mint had done him an injury. He—"

"Still stickin' to *that* story, is he?" said Sneddon, laughing harshly. "Well, I reckon he would. He told it to the sheriff, an' he told it at the trial. Nobody believed him then, an' I reckon nobody will believe him now. He's got gall, though—an' he'll keep on tellin' it.

"I reckon he was tellin' you that it was Mint who killed Tim Owens. He'll tell that so often that he'll end by believin' it himself.

"Larry Redmond's always been a thief. He was run out of Texas, an' struck Legget's Basin standin' on all his legs, with his back up like a tarantula gettin' ready to jump. He's a hell-raisin', roarin' thief an' killer; an' he hates Mint because Mint happened to see him bore Tim Owens.

"I reckon he's got you to sort of believin' him, too," he went on reproachfully. "Redmond always was a devil with women, though—so it ain't none remarkable that he's got you guessin'. But I'd have swore you'd believe your brother before you'd believe him.

"An' there's me and Craim. Both of us seen Redmond throw his gun on Owens. There ain't any doubt about him killin' Owens. He tried to squirm out of it by blamin' the shootin' on Mint, an' he's sore because he couldn't do it.

"He swore at the trial that when he got out of prison he'd kill Mint; an' I reckon he will if Mint's own sister is goin' to help him do it."

Perhaps, after all, Redmond had lied about the incident. Martha now remembered Mint's forbearance in the matter—how he had omitted telling her of the kill-

ing of Owens; merely saying that Redmond had been sent to prison for some such indefinite crime as violating the "new brand law," which, she had supposed, meant that he had stolen cattle.

Had she been too eager to believe ill of Mint? At this instant it seemed she had. For she had intended to force Mint to confront Redmond at the ranch-house. Now it appeared that she had been too credulous, and that if she carried out her original intention of bringing Mint back with her she would merely deliver him into the hands of an implacable, ruthless, merciless enemy.

She sagged uncertainly in the saddle and gazed helplessly at Sneddon, who was watching her narrowly.

It now seemed odd to her that she had doubted Mint at all. Mint was her brother. It seemed she had forgotten that. And being her brother, he could not have done the thing Redmond had accused him of. She realized now how readily she had submitted to the spell of Redmond's strong personality. He had almost persuaded her that her brother was a despicable scoundrel.

She was glad that she had met Sneddon and Craim; glad that they had been wiser than she.

"Mint ain't no gun-slinger," she heard Sneddon say; "nor me nor Craim. We're peaceable, an' don't go around huntin' trouble. We wasn't to blame because we happened to be around when Redmond killed Tim Owens; but Redmond seems to think we was.

"It don't in no way seem right that Redmond should be houndin' Mint like this, an' that Mint's sister should be helpin' him do it. If Mint goes back to the ranch Redmond will kill him as sure as hell! There ain't no chance for Mint!"

Martha sat, pale and wide-eyed, watching Sneddon in the semidarkness. The reaction had left her weak and nerveless, but she was now as intent to save Mint from Redmond as she had been determined to force Mint to grant justice to the other. But she had almost bungled the affair, and she was now willing to be guided by a wisdom deeper than her own.

"What shall I do?" she asked Sneddon.

"Redmond's got to be headed off," said Sneddon. "There ain't room enough in this country for him an' Mint. If they meet, Redmond will kill him. That's certain.

"Redmond's a killer, but he's soft with women. Square with them, too. I reckon—if you'd show him that Mint means a whole lot to you—you could argue him out of killin' Mint. Anyway, if you want Mint to go on livin' you've got to get Redmond away from here. There ain't no man will monkey with Redmond—nor any half-dozen of them. Men around this country give him lots of room when he's seein' red. But you can get him away. Tell him you'll go with him to the sheriff to get to the bottom of that Owens deal. Tell him anything. But get him out of the country.

"We'll hang around. If Mint comes back before you get Redmond away, we'll hold him with us. If you get Redmond to agree to go back to Loma with you to see the sheriff, make him go back by way of Conklin's Pass—it's shorter." He leaned close to her. "Does Redmond know you headed for Dry Bottom?" he inquired.

"I think not," she answered.

"Well," said Sneddon shortly, "I'd get back before he finds out you was away."

"Yes," she said, now breathlessly eager to do the part that the situation seemed to demand of her; "I think I'll go right away. Thank you, Sneddon. I'll do my best to get Redmond to go away. And if I go with him we'll go through Conklin's Pass. Watch for Mint—don't let him come home now!"

She wheeled her horse, as eager to get back as she had been to come. But she faced the back trail with a sinking heart, despite her eagerness, for now that she had heard what Sneddon had to say about the Owens incident she had a new conception of Redmond's character, and she doubted that she would be able to rule him as she had previously decided she could—as a teacher might rule a child.

She rode over the hills toward the long, broad ridge that she had crossed some time before; and when she reached it she halted the horse and looked back the way she had come, searching for Sneddon and Craim. She did not see them; there seemed to be

nothing behind her but luminous, ghostly space and silence. Suddenly appalled at the intense loneliness, and oppressed with a conviction of her helplessness, of her inability to combat the new force that had come into her life in the shape of Redmond, she bowed her face in her hands and wept, while the horse, knowing the trail, went forward steadily.

Back on the little level where she had left Sneddon and Craim there were now three men. Two were Sneddon and Craim, the other was a tall, lean-faced, dark-haired man, with eyes as hard as agate.

"I reckon you got an earful that time, Mint," laughed Sneddon, addressing the third man. "But there was a time—when she looked at that big rock where you was hidin'—that I thought she'd seen you. But I reckon not."

The other laughed lowly, his keen gaze on the long, broad ridge over which Martha had passed.

"She's clear grit," he said. "And she'd have rode all the way to Dry Bottom to warn me about Redmond if you guys hadn't stopped her. I'd been thanking my stars that I run into you boys coming back. But if I'd missed you I'd likely have met her. Luck was favoring me for two ways. I can't lose. But I reckon Redmond will lose if he hits the trail to Loma—and Martha gets him to go through Conklin's Pass. There's spots there where a man couldn't miss with a rifle."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SHORT CUT TO LOMA.

REDMOND did not go very far into the timber. Delicacy, and a precautionary instinct had sent him there. He felt that the girl would not want him to stay in the ranch-house overnight; and he did not purpose bunking in any of the other buildings, to be caught in a trap of his own making should Egan suddenly develop courage enough to seek him. He did not expect Egan to come, but he was taking no chances.

Redmond was afflicted with a whimsical cynicism over the contemplation of what had happened to him. For more than three years he had anticipated this day—the day when he would get within striking distance of Egan. His hatred, his yearning for vengeance, his determination to kill the man—all had been so strong that he had not considered the possibility of his changing his mind.

Standing in the deep gloom at the edge of the timber grove he was considering the miracle of his sudden transformation from an apostle of vengeance to a somewhat abashed protector of a maiden in distress.

"She's certainly got me fannin' it over the back trail," he mused as he watched the moonlight play upon the ranch-house, bathing it in a rich, mellow flood. "I'd sure like to turn Egan into a colander. But I know I ain't goin' to do it—just yet. Not unless he crowds me."

He was still visualizing her as she had sat in the chair in the living-room, watching him as he had related the story of her supposed brother's duplicity.

"She's certainly got fine eyes," he decided. "Right now she's mebbe only half convinced that I'm goin' to kill her brother. I reckon if I *did* kill him, havin' no proof that he's what he is, she wouldn't look at me like she did once or twice at the table." He flushed at the recollection.

He led his horse into a little clearing in the timber, took the bridle off and slipped a hackamore over the animal's head, giving him plenty of loose rope so that he might graze for several hours. Then Redmond returned to the edge of the timber and seated himself upon the trunk of a fallen tree, at a point where he had an uninterrupted view of the ranch-house.

Somehow, he felt little regret over his decision to delay the killing of Egan. His interest had been intrigued by the situation which he had inadvertently stumbled upon. It promised excitement—diversion.

Also it made an insidious appeal to his curiosity.

What was Egan's motive in continuing to pose as Martha's brother? Why, if he meant to keep up the deception, did he not work the ranch? What was meant by the mysterious visits to the ranch of the strange men Martha had spoken of?

Redmond had no answer to these questions, but they received his serious consideration as he sat there watching the ranch-house.

Egan meditated some evil. That was certain. Egan would continue to deceive Martha just as long as he found it expedient to do so. What then?

Redmond's lips curved into a smile that was grimly humorous. It was aroused by the engaging, satisfying thought that he had come to the K Down in time.

He wasn't in any hurry to kill Egan. As long as he was here, where he could keep Egan from harming the girl, there was no need for him to be impatient.

He was more concerned over the sudden change that had taken place in himself. The savage mood into which he had fallen when he had stood at the stove in the kitchen after sending Sneddon and Craim after Egan, had been magically banished by the clear, calm eyes of the girl who had suddenly confronted him.

Something about her had seemed to make his vindictive passions appear ridiculous, absurd, as though the provocation for them had been insufficient. From watching her he had got the impression that one ought to be above thinking vindictive thoughts. It was as though she had caught him doing something unworthy of his manhood, and was mentally reproving him, while intending to say nothing about it.

But the thing that had affected him most had been her evident trust in him. Not once during the time he had been in the ranch-house had she betrayed by word or sign that she feared him. She believed in the honesty and straightforwardness of others as she believed in herself. He thought that was why she had not been suspicious of Egan.

There was a grim humor in the fact of Redmond's presence here in the timber that made a strong appeal to him. He had come here to kill; he intended to remain to serve. Searching his past, he could not remember when he had been more satisfied than now. It wasn't a satisfaction that came of the present; it was a satisfaction that had to do with the future—the seductiveness of anticipation, the prospect of remaining indefinitely where he could study a pair of calm, clear eyes; where he could watch lips that had fascinating curves, a chin and throat of bewitching contour, and soft, brown hair of wondrous beauty.

His romantic thoughts were interrupted by a movement. He saw Martha come out of the ranch-house door and walk stealthily toward the stable. It was evident she had watched him enter the timber, and now thought he still must be somewhere near the spot where he had entered; for she maneuvered so that she kept the stable between herself and that point.

He watched intently, not changing his position. When she emerged from the stable, leading a horse, he surmised the object of her errand; but he did not move.

"She ain't trustin' Sneddon an' Craim," was his thought. "Well, I don't blame her. If it was *my* brother, I reckon I'd want to do the savin' myself—not trustin' any chromos like them."

He saw her mount the horse; watched her as she rode eastward over the moonlit plains. When she vanished from his sight beyond the crest of a ridge he sat steadily gazing at the place where he had last seen her.

"I reckon some things have got to be left to chance," he philosophized to assuage his disappointment and regret over her abrupt leave-taking. "But if she knowed Egan like I know him she wouldn't need to be afraid that he'll come rushin' here the minute Sneddon an' Craim tell him he's got company."

The distance to Dry Bottom was about twenty miles, he knew. Therefore, dismissing the thought that she would meet Egan on the trail, he decided he would have time for sleep.

He searched the timber until he found a suitable spot, several hundred feet from the clearing where he had left his horse. Then he got his blankets and returned. He was ready to sleep when he remembered that he had left his rifle in the saddle holster. That oversight, he admitted with some embarrassment, was due to the fact that he could not get his thoughts off the girl.

He returned for the weapon, and spent some time considering the strategic advan-

tages of the locality he had chosen. Of course, Egan might decide to come to the ranch.

His mood for sleep had gone. He didn't like the idea of Martha setting out after Egan. A great many things might happen to a girl riding alone over a twenty-mile stretch of uninhabited country at night. Sneddon and Craim might even—

He ran to the spot where he had left his blankets, seized them and returned to his horse. Working fast, he threw saddle and bridle on the animal, swung upon him and rode to the edge of the timber.

There he brought the horse to a dizzying halt with a quick press of the reins and a short, "Whoa, Red!"

The command was almost an exclamation of astonishment; for at the instant it had been uttered he had seen, on the ridge where Martha had vanished some time before, a horse and rider clearly outlined against the flood of moonlight.

"Red," he exulted, speaking to the horse; "she's comin' back!"

Redmond slipped out of the saddle, led the horse deep into the timber and returned to the edge, where he stood in the shadows, watching.

He saw that the girl was alone, and that she was riding slowly, as though dispirited. Whereupon his sympathy for her found expression in the muttered expletive:

"Shucks!"

He was surprised when he saw her pass the stable door without dismounting. He thought she might have decided to put the horse in the corral. But when she rode past the corral gate and headed the animal under her directly toward the timber, he divined that she had come seeking him; and he stepped out of the shadows of the trees and walked toward her.

"Lookin' for me?" he asked.

"Yes."

Her voice was low, unsteady. In an instant he was at her side, gripping the bridle rein at the bit ends and drawing the horse's head around so that the moonlight shone full in the girl's face.

"Hell!" he said when he saw her tear-stained eyes. "What's happened to you? Did Sneddon—"

"I haven't seen Sneddon—or anybody!" she declared coldly.

She was furiously angry over the concern in his voice. If he could accuse her brother of a crime so monstrous when he himself was guilty, it would be very easy for him to play the hypocrite to her. She hated him now, she believed, even while she treasured some remnants of her previous admiration of him.

She was puzzled by her emotions. They seemed so contradictory, so illogical. When she had started toward Dry Bottom for Mint she had believed Mint guilty, and she had felt bitterly resentful toward him. She had not been conscious of the slightest impulse of pity or of sympathy. She had merely been eager to avoid violence, to save his life; to patch up the difference somehow between him and Redmond. Since her talk with Sneddon she was convinced that Redmond had lied to her, that *he* had committed the crime and that out of the perverseness of his character—merely because Mint, Sneddon, and Craim had told the truth about him at the trial—he meant to punish them.

She knew she ought to feel bitter toward Redmond. But she knew she didn't feel bitter toward him. She was disappointed, and angry with herself because she admitted it. In admitting her disappointment she was guilty of disloyalty to her brother. But she couldn't help it; and many times while riding toward the ranch-house after leaving Sneddon and Craim she had shamelessly confessed to herself that she liked Redmond better than she liked her brother.

And because she liked Redmond despite a conviction that she shouldn't like him—that she had no right to like him—she was angry with him, herself and everybody.

"You've been cryin'," charged Redmond.

"I suppose I have a right to cry if I want to," she said.

"I reckon every woman has a right to cry—if she wants to," he smiled.

She hated him for that smile, more because of the slow drawl with which his voice had been burdened as he repeated her words.

"I thought you intended getting some sleep," she said suspiciously.

"Changed my mind."

He was puzzled by the vindictiveness in her voice; by the complete change in her attitude toward him.

"Then if you haven't been asleep, I suppose you knew I had gone riding?"

"I sort of suspected you was intendin' to ride when I saw you climbin' on your horse," he said with a grave smile at her.

"Then you *did* see me?"

"Well, I was lookin' at you—I was sittin' on a log over there a little ways. Yes, I reckon I saw you."

"You were spying!" she charged, her chin at a disdainful angle.

"Well, call it what you like," he said, grimly amused at her manner. "I reckon I can't help havin' eyes. An' I couldn't shut them when I saw you sneakin' around the stable. Naturally I wanted to know what was goin' on."

His voice was low, gentle. It irritated her.

"Redmond," she said coldly, "I am going to ride to Loma—to-night. I started for Dry Bottom, intending to ask my brother about the killing of that man—Tim Owens. But I decided it wouldn't do any good to ask him about it; for even if he were guilty he would deny it, since you had been convicted of the crime. I don't believe your story; and so I am going to Loma to have a talk with the sheriff and everybody who knows anything about the killing of Owens. I'm Mint's sister, and I think my feelings ought to be considered before there is anything done—before you meet Mint. If you really are innocent you can't object to my finding out everything about the case before I permit you to have a talk with Mint."

"You're ridin' to Loma to-night?"

He had some difficulty in keeping out of his voice the satisfaction he felt. Getting her away from the K Down had been the problem that had bothered him ever since he had first seen her. He had no concern over what might happen to the ranch after she got away from it. Egan might destroy it if he liked.

But Redmond realized that he must appear to be reluctant to leave. He had no doubt that she had been influenced to her decision to go to Loma by his implied threat against the man she thought was her brother; and the more reluctant he seemed the more eager she would be to get him away.

"This suits me mighty well," he said. "You ride to Loma an' do your gassin' to the sheriff. I'll stay here an' wait for Mint. Mebbe we'll have things all settled when you get back."

"You won't do any such a thing!" she declared firmly. She was terrified by his manner. She *must* get him away. There was no other way to save Mint. And after she got him where he could not harm Mint she must manage in some way to persuade him to drop his plan to kill Mint; she must convince him that there was no justification for revenge of that character. She hadn't the slightest idea about how she was to proceed; she would have time to consider the question after she got him away from the ranch.

"You are going with me!" she said positively. "You came here, telling me a rather weird story, and I want you to go back with me to face the men who found you guilty. I want you to be there so I can decide for myself; and if I feel you have told the truth I shall make Mint do the right thing. Also I want to see your mother and your sister. Isn't that fair?"

Redmond seemed to meditate seriously. She watched him anxiously.

At last he appeared to yield.

"I reckon it's fair," he said. He might have told her that the sheriff who had arrested him, and the judge who had tried him had left Loma more than a year before under suspicion of having been secretly identified with a band of cattle thieves that had been operating in Legget's Basin and the adjacent country. To be sure, there were some of the men of the Owens outfit that she might talk with, but there would be little chance of her learning anything to his credit from them, for they had seen the incident of the killing of Owens as he had described it to her.

Yet he said nothing, for he was eager to get her away.

To influence her to make a start immediately he stared eastward, scowlingly.

"I reckon you won't be goin' until mornin'?" he said.

"I intend starting this very minute!" she declared, noting his gaze. She was afraid Sneddon and Craim would not be able to hold Mint if they should happen to meet him on the Dry Bottom trail. Mint, she felt, would be only too eager to meet Redmond.

"I am ready," she added.

"You'll be takin' some things along," he suggested. "It's likely you'll be away for some time."

"I'll go as I am," she declared. "We'll go straight to your mother's. Then, if I like your mother and sister, I shall ask them for the things I need, temporarily. If I do not like your mother and sister I shall buy some things in Loma."

"Well, I reckon we'll be yearnin' for grub before we strike the basin," he said. "A sixty-mile jog is bound to remind a man that he's in the habit of eatin'. You'd better rustle some grub while I'm gettin' Red ready."

Instead of "getting Red ready" he spent the interval of her absence sitting on the fallen tree-trunk, congratulating himself upon the apparent mutuality of their desires.

When she returned from the ranch-house with some food, compactly folded in a slicker which she had strapped to the cantle of the saddle, he was standing beside his horse. To her he still seemed grave of face and reluctant.

Without a word he swung into the saddle and urged his horse westward. She kept close to him, the muzzle of her animal at the withers of his; and in that manner they rode from the edge of the timber toward the corral fence, faintly traceable in the moonlight.

Redmond went the way he had come, following the corral fence until it came to an end and then keeping straight on over a level that finally brought them near a river.

The task of getting Redmond away from the ranch had proved so easy that Martha could hardly realize that she had succeeded. She kept looking back, almost expecting to see Mint coming over the big ridge eastward; breathing more freely as the distance to the ranch-house steadily lengthened and nothing happened.

Somehow, though her cheeks flamed at the disloyal thought, she almost wished she would discover that Mint was guilty! Much as she disliked to admit it she felt a decided lack of sisterly affection for Mint, and if it were not for the possibility of violence she wouldn't very much care if she found that Redmond had told the truth. There were times when she positively hated Mint, especially when she caught him watching her with an expression she had never succeeded in analyzing, but which seemed to be keenly speculative and cynically humorous.

She believed her wish for Mint's guilt and Redmond's innocence sprang from a conviction that Mint *could* be guilty; that he was of a type predisposed to crime.

That conviction had been hers right along, though she had fought it, assuring herself that she was prejudiced against him because she had been disappointed in his appearance—he was not nearly as good-looking as other Moyers she had seen—and arguing that none of the Moyers she had ever heard of had been criminals.

Still, the conviction persisted—an inner voice insistently and insiduously attacking her pride and her loyalty, until now, when it came to the test, she found that she did not want to defend Mint.

There was no use in trying to delude herself, to attempt to conceal from herself the knowledge that the reason she almost wished it might develop that Mint was guilty was because if Mint were guilty, Redmond would be innocent.

Nor was there any use in trying to protest that her tears, after her talk with Sneddon, were shed for Mint. They weren't—she knew it. They were tears of disappointment and regret, and they had come with the contemplation of the wreck Sneddon had made of Redmond, whom she had idealized. For she had believed Sneddon until the very instant Redmond and she had started for Loma. And then she felt that Sneddon had lied. For if Redmond were guilty he would not have agreed to go back to Loma with her.

They had ridden in silence for more than an hour, and were close to the bottom of the long slope that Redmond had descended, when she rode a little nearer to him.

"I presume you know the trail well?"

"I reckon I won't get lost," he assured her.

"It isn't that," she returned. "I understand there are two trails to Loma, and that the one which runs through Conklin's Pass is the shorter. Are you going that way?"

"In a hurry, eh?" he laughed. "Well, if you're partial to the south trail—that's the one through Conklin's Pass—we'll take it. It's rougher in spots, makin' harder goin', but it certainly is shorter."

He said nothing more, but a little later he swung southward sharply. At a little distance from the trail they had been traveling they crossed a small stream.

Redmond seemed singularly unaware of Martha's presence. He did not even look back at her as they forded the stream. He exhibited no visible concern for her safety, it seemed, though there had been a spot in the creek where her horse had sank under her with sickening suddenness, the water swirling around her ankles. She had stifled a cry of apprehension until it had become a mere low, startled "Oh!" which Redmond had heard, of course.

But he had paid no attention, urging his horse up the sloping bank, striking a level and riding steadily across it.

She was furiously resentful over his apparent lack of concern for her welfare; and after reaching to level she urged her horse beside his.

"I suppose you wouldn't care if I had drowned." She tried to speak calmly, with just enough sarcasm to make him understand that she had noticed his omission of an ordinary courtesy.

"Drowned?" he said, giving her a swift glance. "Why, I reckon I would care. Where was you thinkin' it was goin' to happen?"

"A person usually drowns in water," she scathingly reminded him.

"Sure—if it's deep enough. Where did you see any that you thought you could drown in?"

"Please don't try to be humorous," she reproved coldly. "I am speaking of the river, back there."

"Meanin' the crick we just crossed?" he asked, much deprecation in his voice. "Why, the bottom of that is so close to the top that you can't hardly tell one from the other. There's a little hole just off the ford a piece, which might be up to a man's knees. Do you mean you got into that?"

"Well, you might have shown some concern for me, anyway!" she declared.

He thought of what he was saving her from. She did not see his smile.

"You was pickin' your own trail across that crick, I reckon," he said, not looking at her. "Because you didn't follow me straight an' true you got into trouble. The trail we're ridin' now has got worse places in it. I know them. You don't know them. You've got to trust me more or less—chiefly more—if you don't want to get into trouble that will make that drownin' deal seem mighty insignificant. Understand?"

She didn't understand. She rode on, however; and it was noticeable that she kept directly behind him while she tried to solve the enigma of his speech.

## CHAPTER IX.

### HOGTIED.

THE moon was far eastward of the center of the deep blue arch of sky when Redmond and Martha began to mount a rise that led between the frowning shoulders of two mountains.

Martha had not spoken to Redmond after their short exchange of words near the river. But Martha was still resentful, and she had not solved the riddle he had propounded. But she had wondered if in referring to her experience in the water he had not been subtly warning her of danger to come if she persisted in taking the initiative—if she did not blindly yield to his judgment?

Redmond rode on, following the narrow trail. He had traveled it several times and it was not therefore unfamiliar, but there was the girl to be thought of, and he proceeded more slowly than he would alone.

She had accused him of lack of concern in her welfare; but she would have been astonished had she known of his quick, sidelong glances at her. Even at the stream, where she had thought he must have abandoned her, he had noted her position in the water, had heard her smothered exclamation.

As they went upward the trail became precipitous, hazardous. He slowed Red until the girl's horse was directly behind him. At the crest of the slope, where a rocky level stretched eastward for a little distance, Redmond halted to breathe the horses.

They had ascended several hundred feet, and the peaks of the two mountains nearest them were still high above them. From below the mountains had seemed close together; now they were miles apart, the rock level connecting their shoulders.

The trail led across the center of the level, from east to west. Strewn here and there were huge boulders that must have rolled down the gigantic slopes that flanked the level on either side; looming high above them were rugged cliffs, forming the shoulders of the mountains—jagged granite formations with jutting ledges and thrusting spires of rock.

Martha gazed out and down, over the trail they had traveled. The distance to the plains seemed very far, as remote as the past few hours.

Involuntarily, awed by her view of the great sweep of country below her, and just a trifle frightened by the somber aspect of the mountains on either side of her, she urged her horse close to Redmond's.

"What place is this?" she asked.

"This is Conklin's Pass," he answered, looking sharply at her. "I thought you knew it."

"I merely heard of it," she said. Her face flushed; and on the instant she wondered why Sneddon had advised her to take this trail. At the time he had told her of it she had supposed he had suggested it because it was safer than the other. But she could not understand how any trail could be more dangerous. She had blushed because she had a swift suspicion that Sneddon had an ulterior motive in advising her—a suspicion that when Sneddon had told her about the trail he had meditated evil.

Her horse had been nuzzling Red with an inquisitive muzzle; now he nipped viciously at Red's cheek. Red snorted with astonishment at the suddenness of the attack, and Redmond leaned over and laughingly patted Red's neck.

The movement saved his life.

Martha heard the venomous whine of a bullet; heard the leaden missile strike the granite wall of the cliff at her right; saw a tiny-flame-spurt issue from the dark shoulder of the mountain several hundred feet southward; heard the faint, whiplike report of a rifle.

Then confusion assailed her. She heard Redmond exclaim sharply; his horse lunged against hers, the unexpectedness of the movement nearly throwing her out of the saddle. How Redmond accomplished it she did not know; but she was aware that her horse was moving toward a high rock ridge that she had previously noticed, and that Redmond was directly behind her, driving him.

Before she had time to do any coherent thinking she was behind the ridge, and Redmond, now grimly silent, was beside her.

Redmond slipped out of the saddle, trailed the reins over Red's head; deliberately led her horse close to his own and moved to her stirrup.

"I reckon we'll be holed up here for a little while," he said coolly. "You might as well get down an' stretch your legs."

She got down, he helping her and noting that she was trembling. For an instant as she stood beside her horse Redmond's hands were on her shoulders.

His eyes held an odd expression, which she thought was derision, though she couldn't understand why that emotion should be in his mind at this instant.

"This isn't a joke, Mr. Redmond," she said, stung to a cold composure at his manner.

"Likely it ain't," he said.

He left her, tied the horses so that several feet of space separated them; and then drew his rifle from the saddle holster and ad-

justed the sights. She watched him, fascinated by his deliberation.

Redmond began to mount the ridge, moving slowly and carefully. The slope of the ridge was abrupt, with jagged edges of rock sticking out of it, and was featured with various clefts and miniature ledges.

Redmond had no difficulty in reaching the crest. He had selected a spot that permitted him to rest in a reclining position; though from where Martha stood it seemed he was precariously hanging on.

He did not raise his head above the crest of the ridge. He wriggled and twisted until he found an aperture between two big blocks of stone. There he stayed for a long time, while Martha breathlessly watched him.

Shame, aroused by the conviction that she was responsible for the cowardly attempt on Redmond's life, was Martha's chief emotion as she watched. Sneddon had suggested the trail through Conklin's Pass, knowing that in her eagerness to get Redmond away from the K Down she would not question the wisdom of taking that route. Reviewing the incident of her meeting with the man she remembered the insincere, almost stealthy note in his voice when he had mentioned Conklin's Pass. She had thought, then, that concern for Mint had prompted him to make the suggestion; now she was convinced that all along he had meant to ambush Redmond, using her as an innocent accomplice to an attempted murder. She did not doubt that Sneddon and Craim had watched her from a distance all the time she had been with Redmond on the edge of the timber, and that they had followed, riding a roundabout trail that had led them to the shoulder of the mountain where the shot had been fired.

Redmond climbed down presently. He came close to her, peered at her through the semidarkness and said quietly:

"Can't see a thing—of course. Whoever done the shootin' is takin' care to stay invisible. Mebbe he'll never show himself. You couldn't blame him for not showin', I reckon."

She had feared he would suspect her part in the dastardly plan to kill him; and she had decided she would never tell him what she knew about it. She had cringed from him when he approached her, dreading lest he see from her eyes that she knew.

But when she saw no suspicion in his eyes her emotions reacted, and while he watched her, betraying no emotion, she told him of her meeting with Sneddon and Craim, and of Sneddon's suggestion that she take the trail leading through Conklin's Pass.

When she finished he stood, seemingly unperturbed.

"If you had told me sooner we'd have fooled them," he said. "I reckon I ought to have known it was Sneddon or Craim who did the shootin'. I expect Sneddon convinced you it was me who killed Tim Owens?"

"I don't know," she admitted frankly. "How am I to tell? If it was only Sneddon I think I could decide against him very easily. But my brother is involved, according to your story. You cannot expect me to decide against him without proof, especially when you have been found guilty."

"I reckon it don't make a lot of difference," he said. "It's lucky we brought that grub. From the looks of things we'll be hangin' around here for quite a spell."

"Not very long," she said quickly. "I'm going to march right over to the place where that shot came from and tell Sneddon and Craim a thing or two!"

"You ain't goin' with my permission," he said.

"I'm not asking your permission!" she declared. "I got you into this, and I am going to have this shooting stopped. It is silly!"

"Certainly," he said dryly. "It's rank nonsense. The trouble is, the fellow who is doin' the shootin' don't think so."

She began to tuck in some stray wisps of hair, her eyes glowing with determination.

"I think I can convince him that shooting at you is nonsense," she said.

"You can't talk to Sneddon from here," he said quietly; "it's too far; he'd never hear you."

"I do not expect to talk to him from here; I think I told you I intend to go over there."

"I wouldn't go," he advised.

"I will!" she said defiantly.

He walked to his horse, opened a saddle-pocket and delved within—drawing out several short pieces of rope, used in hog-tying cattle.

Martha watched him wonderingly. He returned and stood before her, looking at her with grave, steady eyes.

"Mebbe you don't understand that I don't mean to let you go over there," he said. "Mebbe that shootin' seems like nonsense to you, but I ain't takin' that view of it. I don't intend to argue a lot about you goin' over there. If you give me your word that you won't go I'll be satisfied. If you don't give me your word—" He paused, looked at the rope in his hand and added shortly, "I ain't takin' any chances."

"You—you wouldn't dare!" she cried, at last understanding him.

"Don't make me do a thing I don't want to do," he said gently. "You've got spirit, an' I admire you for it. But I've got reasons for not wantin' you to go. If you'll just say you won't go, that will end it."

His "reasons" were that he strongly suspected that Egan was with Sneddon and Craim on the shoulder of the mountain opposite. He based the suspicion upon the fact of Martha's meeting the two men on the Dry Bottom trail. It was his opinion that Sneddon and Craim had expected Egan to return to the K Down before morning, and that instead of going to Dry Bottom they had waited for the man on the trail. The fact that they had waited indicated they had some knowledge of his intention to return; and there was a possibility that Egan *had* returned, and was at that moment with the other two on the shoulder of the mountain.

But even if Egan were not with the other two he could not permit Martha to go to them. He did not know whether Egan had told the two men the truth about his impersonation of the man he had killed; it was quite likely that he was deceiving them as he was deceiving the girl. But that possibility could not affect Redmond's determination to keep Martha out of their clutches. He had told Martha he was not taking any chances, and he meant just that. She was away from the K Down, and he meant to keep her away.

The girl's eyes were ablaze with defiance. She stood rigid, her face very white.

"I am going, Redmond!" she declared, using his name without the polite prefix—which told him that she was meeting him on a common level, intending to have her way even if she had to descend to primitive methods. "I intend to walk straight over to that mountain and make Sneddon stop this foolishness. If you attempt to stop me—to touch me, I shall hate you as long as I live!"

"All right," he said. "I reckon you'll have to hate me. There ain't any more time to waste!"

He half turned, as though to leave her; wheeled back again, swiftly; and she found her hands suddenly held in his with a grip that she could not escape. She fought him, though, desperately—loathing him because he had dared to lay hands upon her in violence. But he held her grimly, and with a deftness at which she marveled, looped the rope around her wrists, lashing them close together.

Then, while she mentally anathematized him, though permitting no sound to escape her lips, he dropped swiftly to his knees and looped another rope around her ankles. His movements were so rapid that she had time to kick only once, and then she stood, embittered with impotent fury, looking at him with scorn too great for words.

**(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)**

What does a woman know about running a nation? Quite a lot, as you will find out when you read

"POLLY PLAYS POLITICS"

a long complete story by Howard Rockey, to appear next week.

# Excitement at Simmering Sands

by Harold de Polo

"I TOL' you so, Rainbow," said Hardpan Nichols, with a certain firm bitterness that had a gloating quality to it.

"How come?" asked the other, as his partner started away from the doors of the Golden Pickax in the direction of their shack.

"How come, you ask?" snorted the pessimist. "Huh! Here this come to be the fifth consec'tive stage from over to Hell's Gulch that ain't brought no one nor nothin'. No, sir; I'm remarkin', I am, that Simmerin' Sands ain't *never* goin' to have no more excitement, an' that's whatever! Bleatin' calves, Rainbow, but ain't it been at las' *proved* to you that the worl' has gone an' stopped progressin'?"

The optimist sighed, but the only thing he could think of, to soothe his friend, was his ancient and much-loved phrase: "Differen' times, Hardpan—differen' customs!"

The grouchy old ex-prospector paused, stuck his arms akimbo, and glared almost fiercely at his companion. Indeed, he seemed on the point of actually assaulting him. Whether or not he would have gone to these lengths can never be definitely recorded, for a voice hailed him from the rear: "Well, Hardpan, old-timer, I reckon we got a problem that 'll make you happy. Come on up to Lon's."

Mr. Nichols turned, and saw Tracy Holmes, the young sheriff, striding swiftly along toward the Golden Pickax.

"How come?" he called after him.

"Traipse along and find out," laughed the other, continuing on his way.

"Maybe we better had," put in the optimist quite hopefully, uttering the fervent wish to himself that it might be something that would lead to his crony's constant desire for excitement.

"Oh, well," drawled his partner, simulating a gigantic yawn and trying to hide the sparkle in his eyes, "I suppose you won't give me no peace onless we do!"

But in Lon's bar, where most of the male population congregated, particularly before and after the advent of the biweekly stage, the pessimist was forced to display interest—and intense interest, at that. Briefly, Tracy Holmes was proposing a rather new and staggering proposition. In the town jail, for the last four months, there had languished one Steve Decker, convicted of having held up and robbed a citizen of Simmering Sands. There had been nothing brutal about the crime, and the stranger had not seemed a bad sort at heart, and the crude laws of the mining-camp had decided that one year behind the bars would be sufficient punishment. The trouble now, however, was that the prisoner had received a letter from his old parents back East. They were over seventy, and they had written that they wanted to come out and see their son, on a flying visit, before they passed from earth.

Where the complications arose, however, was in the fact that the above-mentioned Steve had been telling them, in his own letters, of his success in life and of his high position in the community. He was, he had said, the sheriff of Simmering Sands. And it was the real sheriff now, and none other, who was asking the Vigilance Committee to allow the culprit, during the three-day visit of the Deckers, to play the rôle that the mother and father believed his rightful one.

" Panhandlin' prospectors," yelled Hardpan, " but that there shore is goin' to furnish us some fun!"

Most of the audience agreed, but a few of the more conservative frowned upon the suggestion and spoke of setting a bad example. It so happened, too, that they were important members of the committee. Nevertheless, Tracy Holmes, at that, took a firm stand.

" Listen here, people," he said, his eyes and jaw having that set expression they always did when he meant business, " I'm sheriff of Simmerin' Sands, elected by you citizens. I reckon, speakin' mighty plain, that I for a fact held down my job right proper. Anyway, last week when I cleaned out three members of the Kelcey gang, which same is one of the worst that these here regions has known in years, I seem to remember that you-all kind of wanted to give me the town. I didn't want it then, and I don't want it now. All I want is just for you to agree that I'm able to handle this Steve Decker. In lieu of past performances, I think I've give proof it won't be no unaccomplishable task."

For a moment he paused, his gray eyes narrowing slightly as they scanned the crowd. His voice quickened, and he continued:

" I want to let him wear the badge, and the six-gun he'll carry won't hold no cartridges; furthermore, it 'll be broke as to trigger and hammer and spring. I want to ask all of you, whilst the old people are here, to act like this here Decker was a helluva hero and some tremendous popular in this here camp.

" Outside of asking it for a personal favor, I'm asking it of every man that remembers his mother and his father. Boys, it 'd be pretty tough, I'm thinking, to have them come here and find that their son is in jail instead of in the position he told 'em. Remember that they ain't got but a few more years to live, and remember that they'll only be here three days. That's all, boys, and what's the verdict?"

" What's the verdic'?" shrieked Hardpan, with a bang of his fist on the bar that overturned poor Rainbow's beverage. " I'm statin' forceful that if there comes to be one *hombre* present what don't agree with Tracy he jest *ain't* no male *hombre,* an' that's whatever!"

Mr. Nichols endeavored to continue his harangue. Tenderly he dwelt on parental affection; nobly he discoursed on the gratitude Simmering Sands owed to their young sheriff; venomously he pictured what should rightfully happen to any one who would not play up to their part; but it was all unnecessary. To a man, even including Lon Partridge, all promised to do their best and to leave the matter strictly in the hands of Tracy Holmes.

" Well, Hardpan," beamed Rainbow Morrison, as the two were ambling homeward, " I reckon that you got to admit that this here nex' stage will bring you somethin' that 'll furnish that there excitement you always crave, heh?"

The pessimist stopped in the midst of an exuberant speech. He tried valiantly to look inordinately sour, and his voice was tinged with tolerant scorn: " Rainbow Morrison, have I got to spend *all* my life tellin' you that nohow, no way, no matter how good she looks, does any situation do the decen' thing an' live up to what she promises?"

It seemed as if old Hardpan, three days later, would be compelled to admit that at last, after many years, a situation had come along that was decidedly behaving even better than had been expected. Indeed, the pessimistic old codger, as the town waited for the coming of the next stage, actually confessed, as he scratched the chin he had shaved in honor of the occasion:

" Rainbow, this shore is one amusin' settin', an' that's whatever!"

According to the balance of the inhabitants of the camp, he had put it mildly. Steve Decker, the prisoner, was the cynosure of all eyes. He was not a bad chap, from all appearances, now that he was scrubbed and garbed in apparel lent him by Tracy. The big star on his breast was conspicuously bright, and he had to blush every time he looked at it, while the same applied to the revolver that hung at his hip. The legitimate sheriff stood near him, and although he frowned upon remarks of a certain type, the Simmering Sands humorists insisted on making them.

"Reckon Bud Kelcey himself 'd leave the State did he see our brand-new sheriff, huh?"

"My, my, yes! Shore do look vicious!"

"'Most afraid of him myself, I am!"

To these and many more words the pseudo officer of the law remained imperturbable. Presently he changed, for the rattle of the stage from Hell's Gulch was heard. His face whitened, and he spoke with tense pleading.

"Boys," he said, "when I held up Sampson, and got jail for it, I deserved it—I deserved more. I'm not making the excuse, although it's the truth, that I was hungry and down and couldn't get work. I'm willing to take all the medicine you want to give me. Only, for God's sake, I'm asking you now to please carry out this bluff, for it's only for three days. The old folks haven't got much time left in this world, and—and I sort of was the apple of their eyes. Boys, don't let them know differently, will you?"

"You shore are tootin' we won't!" cried Hardpan, accomplishing his favorite trick of always being the first to express an opinion.

And, from the various answers among the crowd, it looked as if the old ex-prospector had told the truth. What is more, it was definitely proven that he had when the ramshackle coach came to a clattering halt before the doors of the Golden Pickax.

"Well, Steve, old man," said Tracy loudly, "we shore are glad to welcome the mother and father of our sheriff to Simmerin' Sands!"

"We shore are," echoed the crowd and cheered lustily.

Then, with the assistance of young Decker, the old people were helped from the ancient vehicle. As the kindly Rainbow explained it, they were the sort of folks that got right to your heart at the beginning. The mother was a slim little wisp of a woman, with merry eyes and a friendly smile; the father, a tall and gaunt and very straight man, had that clear-blue eye that commands respect coupled with sincere liking."

"Well, son," he said, placing his hands on Steve's shoulders when the first greetings were over, "I'm certainly a proud man. Yes, sir, I'm about as proud as the day when General Sherman shook my hand with his own—his own—and told me I'd done my duty cleanly through the whole war.

"It's a great thing, boy, is duty; and it's a great position you hold, a sheriff in as important a camp as Simmering Sands, in this wonderful West. And from the way these gentlemen act, Steve, I'm judging that you've held down your job as it should be held. Yes, boy, I'm proud!"

"Th-thanks, dad," Steve managed to say, a flash of what must have been torture going across his face.

"I'm thankin' Gawd," mused Hardpan, in a vein new to him, "that I ain't no father of no son. Jest—jest suppose he finds out the truth, Rainbow?"

"He won't, ol'-timer," said the optimist firmly; and added, more softly: "But I reckon being the father part is worth it!"

Provided that a parent might have such a progeny as Steve was *supposed* to be, it was shown that Rainbow's assertion, in this case, was entirely correct. To the credit of every man—and the few women—in Simmering Sands, let it be herewith recorded that they lived up to their words like the game yet reckless people they were. They showed the Deckers what the real hospitality of the West means; and they likewise showed them, incidentally doing some superb acting, what they were supposed to think of their son Steve. The famous townliars had a wonderful chance to exert their powers, a few of the most conservative

joined in with them, and even old truthful Rainbow manufactured a tale.

"Yessir, ma'am; yessir, sir," he told them, "we-all shore are plumb an' plain proud o' Steve. Why, this here Kelcey gang, what even you people back in the East maybe might have heard about, comes to be one o' the worst bunches we ever had in the State. An' it's our sheriff o' Simmerin' Sands—our, our Steve—that's the he-man what went an' cleaned out three o' their members on'y 'bout a week ago. We shore are proud o' him!"

But, although the days and nights went swimmingly, and all of the camp did so nobly, poor Steve Decker was having a hard time. Before his parents he was all that could be expected of him, and more. He played his part properly, accepting the praise and respect of his presumable fellow citizens with becoming modesty; away from them he showed the agony, mentally, through which he was constantly going. His face would whiten and sag, and dull, heartrending pain would come to his eyes.

"Yes, sir, ol'-timer," mused Rainbow to his pard, "I'd like better to be a father than a son. Even though that fine ol' gent found out the truth, he wouldn't suffer not half as much like the boy has suffered already!"

Wherein it goes to intimate that the ex-prospector was no dullard when it came to judging human nature—and this was further attested.

"Tracy Holmes," said Steve, when the sheriff took him home after the second night, "God knows I appreciate what you're doing for me—but God knows I'm paying for it, and will pay until I die. I guess I've been pretty much of a good-for-nothing, most of my life—although I never did anything as bad as this hold-up I'm in for—but I never knew just how useless and rotten I was until lately.

"Tracy, it's made me see what a mean deal I've given mother and dad, and I swear that after I get free from jail I'm certainly going to buck up and be a man. It—it makes me feel like the worst and lowest cheat in the world to keep on lying and lying to them. Don't worry, I'm paying!"

"Sometimes," had been the sheriff's answer, "it does a fellow good to be able to—when he knows it!"

The next evening, however, one would have thought Steve Decker the happiest man in the universe. It was the last night of the visit of his mother and father, and a dance was being given in their honor. It was, every one claimed, to be a rip-snorting affair, along most genteel lines, and meant to demonstrate in what esteem Mr. and Mrs. Decker, as well as their son Steve, was held by the community at large.

Lon Partridge had donated the whole first floor of the Golden Pickax for the dance. Seeing that it was taken up by his bar and gaming-room and dance-hall, and that he had a very passion for the gold dust these speculations brought him, it can be realized what a sacrifice he was making.

Anyway, the whole thing opened most beautifully, with the pseudo sheriff's parents in the seats of honor. As for Steve himself, he was beaming and bowing and handling matters quite expertly, and it is safe to say that Rainbow, in his whispered remark to Hardpan, was hitting the nail on the head.

"Stingin' tarantulas, ol'-timer," was his opinion, "but it shore does seem a shame this here young Steve has to go back in the mornin' to that there jail. Yes, sir, I'm sayin' that every he-man here prob'ly wishes the boy was actin' his *real* part in life now. He—he seems right likable!"

Before the veteran pessimist could reply, though, a breathless and gasping prospector, in travel-stained garb, burst into the room and cried:

"Where's the sheriff? Where's Tra—"

"There's the sheriff—Steve Decker! There's the sheriff of Simmerin' Sands!"

The words had come from Tracy Holmes, and his gray eyes were drilling through those of the newcomer. The latter, being wise in the ways of the West, and mining-camps in particular, took his cue.

"Oh, yes, Steve—Steve Decker," he said. "Well, sheriff, I jest trailed in from a trip, I did, an' toward the edge o' camp I ran acrost this here Bud Kelcey. He's travelin' alone, he is, an' he asks me to bring a message to—to the sheriff o' Simmerin' Sands.

"He says if he's a he-man, an' therefore game like he should be, to come out to the end o' the camp with his six-gun hangin' low an' loose, an' his arm right ready to draw. He says he's there to avenge the killin' o' his three pals, an' that he's ridin' fair!"

A gasp came from the crowd—and then silence. Bud Kelcey was deemed one of the deadliest and quickest shots in the State, and there was a price on his head. All eyes turned to the sheriff—to the real sheriff. He stood there, did Tracy Holmes, looking at the man next to him, Steve Decker, as the latter was looking at him. Both had whitened; not from any fear, but from puzzlement as to what to say. This trouble was suddenly eradicated.

"Son, you know your duty!" Firmly, almost harshly so as to suppress the emotion in his breast, the words came from Steve's father. Tall and gaunt and very straight, the old man stood there with his eyes glinting proudly, as he must have stood on the occasion he had mentioned when General Sherman had shaken his hand.

"Steve—oh, Steve!" At the voice of his mother young Decker sprang to her side. He took her in his arms, kissed her, and laughed somewhat shakily.

"Got to rush, mother," he said, "for you know what dad says about duty. Be back soon anyway."

Then hurriedly he grasped the hand of his father, shook it, and turned to Tracy as the older Decker comforted his wife.

"Good luck, son," called out the old man, "and you generally get it while you're doing your duty and are in the right!"

The thing had happened quickly, and, under the quick and cool handling of Steve and Tracy, the two were out of the room before the majority of the occupants fully realized what had occurred.

Out in the quiet and moonlit street—the single street that the camp was able to boast—Steve Decker was gripping an arm of Tracy Holmes with fingers that bit into the flesh.

"Holmes," he pleaded, "you've go to do it—*you've got to!* It's my only chance; it's my only chance to make good to mother and dad; it's my only chance to make good to myself; it's my only chance to make good to you and all the rest that have treated me like such a prince! Give it to me, Holmes, and I swear I'll play the man!"

"I'm not doubtin' the last, Decker," replied the young sheriff, his face now very serious, "but it's that this here is my quarrel, this here is my job. I—I can't turn it to no one else!"

"Holmes," said Steve Decker, "you were fine enough and man enough to let me out of jail and to play this part—and to persuade the whole town to—for the sake of my parents, and mine, and I'm beggin' you to go the limit and carry it out to the end.

"Don't you see what you've done to me? You've made me want to be the man they think me; you've made me ashamed of the good-for-nothing rotter I've been all my life; you've awakened in me something decent that nothing or no one else has been able to. One way or the other, it can't matter to you—and one way or the other it means everything in the world to me. If he gets me, I'll at least die with them thinking me a man; if I get him, I'm helping carry out the law, and I'm therefore balancing up some of the marks against me. Tracy Holmes, I know you're a man—you've certainly proved it—and I'm asking you to give me the biggest chance to redeem myself that I ever had in the world!"

As his prisoner paused, waiting tensely for the answer, the young sheriff of Simmering Sands scrutinized him with those clear, gray eyes—eyes that, it was said, could look into the very soul of a man. For perhaps twenty seconds or so he stood there, and then suddenly his hand went out and plucked the mechanically imperfect weapon from the holster of the other. Following this, he extracted his own revolver and handed it to Steve.

"Decker," he said quietly, "here's my iron, and over there's my cayuse. Take 'em both—and good luck to you. If you don't come back, I'll know you went out like a man, and I'll get Kelcey; if you do get back, you know you got a friend!"

Steve Decker's face set grimly, happily. He stuck out his hand and took that of the sheriff.

"Thanks," he said simply, and strode over to the horse.

"I'll be waitin' for the shots before ridin' down," Tracy called after him as he loped off.

He was not kept in suspense long. He heard the lope turn into a gallop; he heard the gallop gradually grow fainter; he heard a report—and then a series of them. With a leap he was over across the way, into a saddle, and thundering on down the street. At the edge of the camp he pulled up, and, springing from his mount, ran to where two forms were stretched in the moonlight. One of them was Kelcey's, and a bullet had caught him squarely between the eyes; the other was Decker's, and a glad cry came to his lips as he discovered that it was no more than a wound through the shoulder that had unseated him, and that he was stunned by the fall.

Even as Tracy started to lift him, and others came rushing along, he opened his eyes.

"I got him fairly, Tracy," he said—"and thanks!"

In all the history of Simmering Sands, never had the stage leaving for Hell's Gulch and points beyond had such a mighty send-off. Including the children—and even Boiled Shirt Joe, the most callous faro-dealer in the West—all were there to wish Mr. and Mrs. Decker a merry and a safe trip. Then Steve Decker faced the crowd.

"People," he said, "I want to thank every one for what they've done for me. I don't mean, you see, just for acting the way you did to make mother and dad happy—but for what you've done in making me a man. I'm not going to say much; I'm just going to say that I've been pretty mostly useless in the world, although I honestly never did any great harm. That hold-up was my first crime—and my last. After how you've shown me how big a thing it is to be a decent and honest citizen, I'm saying that when I finish out the rest of my term I'm going to settle down right here in Simmering Sands and make something out of myself. That's all—and thanks!"

Calmly he turned to Tracy Holmes, ready to be taken back to jail—but a great cheer rent the air, and, as it subsided, Hardpan Nichols for once was beaten at getting in the first word.

"Boys," Tracy Holmes was saying, "I'm hoping and I'm reckoning that you'll all agree with me. I'm saying, I am, that Steve here has paid for his mistake enough with his four months in the coop—and that he's certainly set himself right with the world forever by getting this here Kelcey. I need a permanent deputy plumb bad to wipe out the rest of the Kelcey crowd and a few more outlaws. And, boys, I think he's the man for it!"

"Think it—*think it?*" roared Hardpan, determined not to be caught for the second time. "Panhandlin' prospectors, *I know it!*"

Judging by the hilarious shout that went up from the rest, Mr. Nichols had correctly summed up the sentiments of all.

Moreover, he was fairly proud of it. For, as he and Rainbow walked home after things had quieted down, he was chuckling continually to himself and his eyes held the sparkle in them that the optimist loved to see there.

"Well, Hardpan," said his partner finally, his voice joyous, "I shore do reckon, I do, that at last you got to allow this is a mighty fine an' a progressin' ol' worl', heh? I shore do reckon that Simmerin' Sands has seen enough excitement to suit you!"

Mr. Nichols stopped chuckling. He coughed; he spluttered; he madly racked his brain for an answer.

"Yes, sir," repeated his companion, "I shore do!"

A gleeful smile suddenly came to the pessimist's face. In that manner that suggested his rebuking an erring child, he turned to his old crony.

"Ever hear of that there fox-huntin' they do back in that there effete East country?" he drawled.

"How—how come, Hardpan?"

"Bleatin' calves, Rainbow, don't you know it ain't considered no fun onless a *hombre's* in on the kill? An' did we see this here Kelcey shot? No, ol'-timer, it ain't jest no use. You don't *want* to get learned that you can't nohow make things perfec'!"

# Midas

## by Francis James

**Author of "The Yellow Emerald," "Prey," "Imagination," etc.**

### CHAPTER I.

"DID YOU EVER KNOW A MAN NAMED—"

THE proprietor of the Black Goose set his glass and tilted back from the table. He looked at his two guests, one of whom had asked the curious question, while the other, the younger, steadily growing more intoxicated, had not been able to keep his dulled eyes from flaring into light at it.

Grinning all over his huge square face, inwardly contemptuous, Pottick read their countenances.

*Chechahcos*, tenderfeet, both; the speaker, a smooth-shaven giant, hulking and broad-shouldered. That he was new to the North was evident, because the full flesh of city life still clung to his bones and his voice swaggered with its insolence.

The other had only lolled over the table in silence, drinking moodily, and never letting his eyes waver from the proprietor's face. He was a slight, white-skinned youngster, poorly clothed, with the stubble of a week in the hollows of his cheeks.

The big city man inquired about prospecting—he had thought of looking around—had any one struck pay dirt lately?

The wrinkles around Pottick's flat mouth corners broadened upward, merging with those that brindled outward from his eyes. It was a slow, benignant smile, befitting such a mountain of a man, like that of an Unalaska Inuit glimpsing a beautiful new pearl-handled knife. His voice was soft, like a tiger's purring. No one had ever heard it otherwise. But there was that in the clash of his glance with theirs that made the others want to drop their eyes. The slender youth nervously slopped his glass full again, gulped half of it, and darted a hurried look, first at the big stranger, then at Pottick.

"Yes," he muttered, "pay dirt—pay dirt—chasing golden dreams—the rainbows end! Look here, man"—he lurched forward, clutching Pottick's sleeve—"did *you* ever know a fellow by name of—"

"Prospecting! I guess yes, pardner!" Pottick interrupted, laughing. He was speaking to the big man, who had said his name was Parsons, both ignoring the other's mumblings. "Pay dirt, you ask? No! Not for years." Turning in his chair, he raised his voice, cupping his hands about his lips. "Nalunka! Nalunka! She will tell, the witch! She—"

The *chechahco*, Parsons, thumped his tumbler on the bare table and his face turned dark. The slim young man guffawed maudlinly, then fell forward on his outspread arms. The city man barked out:

"What do you mean? I said, *pay dirt!* How many ways do you get that, huh? Why not? Ain't this gold country? They told me when I got here I'd find something besides a frozen graveyard—"

"Heh!" Pottick laughed silently. "You ask for pay dirt? Have you brought the outfit? Twenty years they come by on foot, asking that, all of them, and now in two more the government's railroad will bring them—by hundreds, I suppose!" He leaned back, shaking with mocking laughter. "All prospecting!" He brought his chair down sharply on all four legs and thrust his face, now sober, at the others.

"No; no pay dirt and no gold, stranger. Never a grain; not since the last poor divil in ninety-nine. But here, if a man's got his eyes open—"

The other nodded.

"The railroad, eh? Timber?"

Pottick assented. "Through Black Goose here up the gulch, over the divide, down Fox Creek to the Fort. Any kind of a claim, any location, any option—"

"But the insiders—the big guns at Washington and New York—haven't they salted it—"

There was an interruption. The sprawling figure at the table stirred suddenly, sat up, thumped the empty bottle and demanded drink. Pottick raised a finger to the white-jacketed bar-man, who handed a fresh bottle to one of the waitresses. As she set it down, Parsons leered at her and snatched her waist between his hands, but she was too quick for him and twitched away. He laughed raucously, noticing the slow grin that lighted the breed's face.

"That new girl," explained the latter. "No good. Have her t'ree month—"

The young fellow interrupted. He had filled three glasses and wavered to his feet. His glance caught the breed's as he laughed tipsily.

"Here, you fellows," he hiccuped out. "Who said 'outfit?' That's me—outfit. Sled, dogs, furs, grub—everything. Goin' on long trip, cap'n. Won't you grub-stake—me—what?" His hands fished the pockets and twitched out empty. "Broke—stony broke, by God, up here in seven hells!" He peered anxiously at the other. "But you'll grub-stake me, won't you, pardner, before God you will!"

His voice broke as he wavered, half collapsed and flung an arm about the breed's broad shoulders for support. Then his face took on a crafty expression of tipsy diplomacy, as he barely whispered in the big man's ear: "Got dead sure tip this time, old pal. Dead on the inside—claim rich as Midas, lost and never worked. No one else knows how to find it. We'll split millions—fifty-fifty—if you'll stake me. And listen, commodore, did you ever hear of a man named—"

At the sound of the first name, that of the ancient with the magic touch, Pottick, for the tiniest perceptible fraction of a second, paused in his act of easing the youth into his chair, and stood as if frozen. He seemed to be listening tensely. He was listening for a name; that of a man he was accused of knowing. But if the other ever uttered it, it was in vain, for the electric piano across the room drowned out all speech below a shout, and again the sodden youth subsided into lethargy, out of which he seemed to be listening with horror to the jazzing uproar which had already filled the middle of the floor with dancers.

Pottick, although but one-half white, and Northland born—his mother's mother had been a Siwash squaw and his maternal grandfather a rascal Eskimo, a "Tiglipok"—had gone South when five years old in company with Spike Johnson, his Swedish father, for a fifteen years' sojourn among his betters at San Francisco, New Orleans and Hoboken; whence, although he could not quite polish the Mongol burr out of his speech, he had acquired many distinctly civilized ideas, one of which was the importation of pretty girls for his wilderness hostelry, ostensibly as waitresses, but serving mostly as general entertainers to the guests. Every evening there was dancing, and it was on, full force, swirling about the little corner table.

As Pottick seated the young fellow, he winked to the big man, jerked his head knowingly.

"That's how they get," he murmured, "after they cross the line, sometimes. Especially after sundown. Six months of night—heh! It is hard on tired nerves!" His voice was jocular, his manner changed, but the big guest would have seen, if he had been observant, that the breed's eyes were glittering cold and thoughtful. "You

want pay-dirt, stranger. Perhaps you're right—who knows? I will get Nalunka; she is an old witch that has the devil's eyes and ears—"

Again he called, his soft yet deep voice carrying over the din and clatter of the glasses on the bar, the many scraping feet and the rushing sound of conversation. There were close to two score men and women in Pottick's hall.

In a moment a door across the room opened and a curious figure began to make its way toward them across the crowded floor.

She was old, very old; wizen, withered, bowed, fleshless as a grasshopper. Her broad, high chiseled face, once coppery bronze, had weathered under endless Arctic suns and frosts to a leatherish brown. The skin, stretched tight over the outstanding bones, was a parchment-like membrane, combed by myriads of big and tiny furrows, from the midst of which the long nose protruded like an eagle's beak.

She came up and paused at Pottick's elbow.

"The walrus barked?" she said.

Pottick glanced at his guest.

"Nalunka is old and dried up as a sun-struck tree, but her eyes are eagles'. She goes everywhere, but no one sees her; even the foxes hear no footsteps. She is a witch. She finds out all that happens. Her ears are keener than the birds'. A police hat she smells ten miles away. We will ask her."

He turned to the crone.

"The white stranger, the *chechahco*, would know of us, Nalunka, where there is gold. What say you? Have you heard of mines—new mines discovered, these hundred moons past? Has the wind in winter or in summer brought the sound of the pickax, striking in pay dirt or the water washing about gravel in the pan? What say you, old she-fox?"

For an instant the old woman's eyes flashed at the questioner like glowing coals out of a cavern. Then the flicker of light snuffed out, leaving the face stolid as a tree trunk. She shook her head.

"The eagle's brood is dead," she said. "The snow comes and fills the little caves. Rabbits know where to dig for food, but the mink that leaves his hole is lost. Let the *chechahco* go back to his city."

The hotel-keeper turned to Parsons.

"Nalunka speaks. You see! If there was gold, the she-devil would have heard of it. Not these ten years past has a pick made itself a yellow tip. You come late, stranger—always by night they come. If it had been earlier—ten weeks back in the sunshine—and you had stood on the peak of the great rock over there, and looked down on Black Goose, you could have seen for yourself that this town is a place of ghosts—"

And that was so. No one, stranger or Siwash, could have gazed from the top of Black Goose Mountain upon the settlement across the stream and failed to read its story.

## CHAPTER II.

### BLACK GOOSE.

SIXTY miles above the point where Goose Creek empties its tawny, silted contribution into that mother of Alaska, the great Yukon, stands Black Goose. In the old days it was the last town in centuries of miles—an oasis or a jumping-off place at the very edge of the primeval. Range after range, north, south, east, west, stretched an unbroken sea of hills and valleys, green in summer, white in winter, always inscrutable, always sinister and perilous.

It was a mushroom town. Some lucky dog of a prospector had made it the center of a strike field. Over night, literally, white tents had sprinkled the interstices between the evergreens, giving place gradually to more substantial shacks; the hotel had been thrown up; the main street had blossomed out to stores, shooting galleries, a tawdry theater or two. At the intersection of two lines of travel, Goose Creek and the Overland trail, it became the center of supplies for a fifty-mile circle of diggings and prospectors.

But as in so many cases, the pay streaks, fabulously pregnant while they lasted, proved thin. One by one they were worked

out. The claim holders cleaned up, each according to his faith, patience or ability, and vanished like ghosts into the unknown.

Again almost in a moon's time from the beginning of the flight, Black Goose stood dry and drained. Nine-tenths of the cabins were abandoned. The placer ditches were deserted, the lodge-shafts half-filled with crumbling rock and overgrown with saplings.

But for two circumstances the place would have been left utterly to the owls and vermin; one of them was that across the precise middle of what had been Main Street, ran that imaginary linear of legality—the International Boundary Line, separating Canadian from American possessions.

What that fact could have meant in the wild days of the stampede, the imagination can grasp without assistance. What potentialities it still held for Alan Pottick, whose hotel had been wisely built half to the east, half to the west, thereof, is also fairly clear.

Accordingly, a semblance of life—of a certain type—had been kept up in this frontier junction town. That life centered in, around and about the hotel. The hotel, with its saloon, dance hall, gambling "parlor," sleeping lofts and dining-room combined, furnished the town with shelter, entertainment, subsistence, protection and oblivion.

But the end of all this was foreshadowed. Six months earlier rumors had begun to filter through that the Government, in its wisdom, had seen fit to ordain a railroad—a spur of the main line passing through Aurora—to go up the creek to Black Goose, thence out into the Beyond.

On the heels of these tidings came confirmation in the form of engineers, officials, surveyors and what not. All through the brief, mosquito-tortured summer they had blazed trails through the wilderness, sighted instruments, figured, laid out grades and bounds. With the return of cold and the long dusk, they had vanished, leaving behind a promise and a threat—assurance of a new birth to the ruined town, and with the coming of it, an end to the old order and the reign of Alan Pottick.

Like the guests of any hostelry, Pottick's came, partook of good cheer, departed. No questions asked. But Pottick's discretion was known; his confidents therefore many. In his crudely shrewd way, he was always courteous to new arrivals, yet with an undercurrent of sageness that sapped them of any notion of "wiseness" they may have entertained. He was not a pleasant man to talk cross purposes with. He had an indubitably long, unscrupulous arm, a bad name, and he went unaccused.

He possessed the reticence of his Unalaska forebears, the sageness and native eloquence of his Siwash grandmother, the pure knife-thrusting cussedness of his rattish father. His skin, oddly enough, was light; almost blond, except where yellowed to fine-lined leather by frost and sun. The Mongol blood showed itself in his face, square below the eyes, widest at the cheekbones, sloping up sharply toward the crown. His hair was smooth and Scandinavian yellow. Only his eyes and nose marked the Indian in him. As for his soul, it was quite black.

"That was twelve—fifteen years back," said Pottick, explaining the failure of the lode. "Since then—" He looked up at the Indian once more. "There is no gold in Goose Creek—eh, Nalunka, you old screech-owl—what sayest thou, canst find ten grains to show *chechahco?*"

"The owl is wise," croaked the old woman, "for he sees and tells not. Only by night he mocks those who speak their thoughts out in dreams. But the blue-jay screeches in the pine tree and is shot."

With a dry cackle she turned on her heel and made off across the floor.

"What does she mean by that?" demanded Parsons. "Is she kidding you, or does she think she knows something and won't loosen up?"

Pottick swore.

"Damn her, the witch! She ought to be burned. I ought to have had her burned years ago, before the government got so fussy about everything that goes on in the woods—"

"Why?" asked the youngster.

Unnoticed, he had propped up on an elbow, head wavering but eyes steady, drink-

ing in the conversation. His look followed the old woman as she departed. "What did she do to you?"

"Heh?" Pottick flashed a second's glance, then laughed shortly. "Oh! You awake again, heh? What did the hag do? Well, stranger, that is a long story—a story of long ago, too. Perhaps nothing, perhaps much. But she is a witch and some day I will have her burned." The big man laughed. "And now as to yourself, pardner. You have drunk, heh, of my wines, and how are you to pay? By asking me to grub-stake you, it seems. Why should I? What do you know? You have heard a story; you can locate a claim, rich, abandoned—"

With a clatter the young man jerked away from Pottick's grasp and staggered to his feet.

"*You* grub-stake me? You're crazy. I never said—"

The half-breed's eyes narrowed. His hand, shooting out, clutched the other's wrist.

"No man tells Alan Pottick he is crazy. You have said that thing and many more besides—that you were broke, for one. Two days you stay here now. My bill—do I collect it from the sparrows?"

The youth's face went, if possible, whiter under the stubble.

"Your bill, I'll pay it, damn you! If I talked, it was your rotten booze! You tried to put me out! You were after something—you're a crook, it seems, the same as all the rest—"

Pottick's left hand, which still clutched the speaker's wrist, while the right flashed to his pistol hilt, was suddenly empty, with a surprisingly painful ache in the strained tendons. Also, as the young fellow twitched free, he gave a sudden twist to the half-breed's forearm that tumbled the latter back ignominiously into a pair of empty chairs. When Pottick recovered his equilibrium the stranger was out of sight.

"Went into the crowd," remarked Parsons, eying him sidewise. "Going to—"

"I am glad," purred the breed softly. "For a moment I was angry and it is better that I do not see him. In anger one acts without thought. I shall wait."

As a matter of fact, the young fellow had passed quickly through the throng, caught his mink *parka*, boots and mittens from the hook by the door, hastily drawn them on and slipped outside. Without leaving the vicinity he began to stride fiercely up and down on the crisp snow, drawing in deep breaths of the scorching cold air.

## CHAPTER III.

### TWO AND ONE.

THE two men whom he had left at the bare, booze-flecked table drew closer together. It seemed as though his departure had let down some tacit restraint between them; though until three hours previous neither of them had seen the other. There is a neat little saying about birds of a feather—

Pottick's hand fell on the big man's sleeve and he leaned forward to whisper.

"Listen. Two nights ago he—that *Taglipok*, who says his name is Sanders, came. He has no money; he drinks much; he talks about pay dirt. There is a man he wants to find. This is his last guess. But he will not quite say out the name, even when I have filled him up with rum. I have done that three times, on purpose—you see what happens. I begin to think maybe I am wrong. Perhaps he is only fool of young prospector who has shaken hands with the willows.

"But now, *you* follow. You come on his heels; you ask also for pay dirt. So I begin to think—I do not know. There is a story around here. You two are strangers to each other. It is puzzling. Tell me what you know; then I will see—perhaps we could be partners—"

Parsons laughed gratingly.

"So you want me to come clean, while you hold back? I may be a fool prospector, or I may be trailing this bird, or I may be plain crook, talking pay dirt for a stall. What would you give—"

"No man closes his eyes to gold more than to a pretty woman," prompted the Indian softly, his gaze resting on the waitress who had served them. She was

dancing now, swinging about the floor with a half-drunken fur trader who wolfishly crushed her slender figure in his arms. In a second she was lost to view. "Any more than to a lovely woman," repeated Pottick thoughtfully. His glance shifted back to the other, who had also turned to look. "Pottick is honest, even to the police. That is why he has been in Black Goose twenty years, a friend to all men. You help me; I will help you. Perhaps—who knows—the stranger, the *chechahco* who comes so secretly"—he half closed his eyes—"may hold the missing puzzle-piece—"

"Then there *is* gold?" snapped Parsons breathlessly, watching the black coals glowing in the other's eyes. "You know—"

"I know—and I do not. There is a mystery. There is something more—something I have waited for these twenty years—ever since the lode went dead. I would divide with you—"

Parsons hitched his chair still closer, and laughed shortly.

"Listen. On the way up here I picked up a word or two one night—never mind how—of this Sanders; this *chechahco,* as you call him. We happened to be on the same boat. He was so drunk that he doesn't remember me. It set me thinking. That was why I asked you about pay dirt. At first I had a notion, if there was anything doing, I might stop off a while. But it's out of the question. Never do," he grimaced. "I'm pushing on—out into the dark. So I'm not interested in secrets—our young friend's there, or yours. Any dope that I happen to have that you can use, I'm willing—"

"Ah!" A single word, soft, hot, long drawn, escaped the half-breed's lips.

Parsons turned, beckoned to a bargirl, and leaned forward on the table, his face close to the other's.

"—To sell!" he smiled triumphantly.

Pottick recoiled.

"To sell!" he exploded. "You—How much?"

Parsons's eyelid fluttered. "My price!" The whisky having come, he filled the glasses and pushed one toward the half-breed. "I don't think you'd call it high." He leered significantly. "You spoke of a new girl here; said she was no good. I suppose—you haven't a contract with her, have you? I mean, you'd release her—"

Dawning comprehension contorted Pottick's features into a slow grimace.

"Oh! Heh! I see!" he chuckled "You—"

"I'm traveling," explained Parsons with mock severity. "I've a long ways yet to go. A man gets lonesome on the trail. I've been looking her over. She's good to me. I'm willing to tell you what I know about Midas and John—"

Pottick's hand, flashing up sharply, arrested him.

"Wait! The lynx's ears are keen. This girl—if I agree, you intend to—to— She would not go with you. That is the trouble, damn her! The finest wench I ever saw come up the trail—and she was ready to come! Hell, yes! Starving, and glad to do anything to live, she said. But she lied. I tried to be good friends to her. I offered her—everything. But no, she is too—well, my stranger friend, I tell you, she is a curiosity; she is particular, heh—"

Leaning back in his chair, the huge fellow gave himself up to gusts of soft laughter. Through it he could see that Parsons was impatiently waiting to speak. At last he sat up, wiping his eyes.

"Well, you are not alarmed at that. How do you propose to carry off your game, heh, if she will not go? There is some law, even here, you know; you cannot—"

"That's bunk. There's no law that *you* can't find a way around if you want to. But it's not necessary. Suppose I offered to marry her. Give her a choice; me or the gate. It's a long walk down to Aurora. How long would she want to make up her mind?"

Pottick eyed him curiously.

"You marry her, heh?"

"You put up the parson, yes."

Pottick sighed.

"She damn fine girl, this one. Best one I ever got here. I t'ink long time marry her myself. But she—heh, she heap too good, she t'ink. One time she tell me—" His eyes slitted and kindled at the recol-

lection. He thumped his mammoth fist on the table. "Pretty damn good, serve her right! Have to marry *chechahco* gunman, hit the trail in January, get beat up, thrown away bimeby somewhere like dead horse on Chilkoot Pass—I get her for you, plenty fellows out there make merry, good enough anyway for Yukon. You take her off tomorrow."

The girl, who at that moment happened to be passing, left her partner at his beckoned finger and came up. She stood, hands behind her, across the table from the two.

Outwardly she seemed to be of a type easy to classify. Yet, after all, there was something about her that did not fit, and neither of the men failed to realize it.

The dress that hung from her shoulders was a bedraggled décolleté. The neck and shoulders were heavily powdered; the hair heaped in a tangled pompadour. Her cheeks flaunted scarlet roses on a background of dead enameled white. Her story appeared as photographically clear as her get-up: the third-class show-girl, whose troupe has gone broke midway of an ill-omened campaign, leaving the members, like frightened chickens, to scatter to the four winds, seeking sustenance till the morrow.

For one silent moment the three glances held one another. Parsons, for the first time, was seeing her close enough to catch the surprise—the fact that her features, quite hidden, ten feet away, under the plasterings of make-up, had about them something incongruously fine. Her nose was slender, firmly chiseled; the face a pure oval, with softly molded chin, the forehead high, the lips full, delicately curved and firm. She stood erect, bosom heaving quickly, looking them full in the eyes. In the poise of her head, slightly side-tilted, with her chin up, there was a curious, unsuspected note—a dash of stubborness, of reckless defiance even, as surprising as it was stimulating to the pulses.

His blood began to pound in his ears and he looked at Pottick. The half-breed's were fixed on him, red spots burned in either cheek, and he tapped the table-top nervously with one square forefinger.

"Miss Hawkes, you say how-do to Mr. Parsons," he began. "Mr. Parsons old friend of mine, just come along here tonight. He talk 'bout you. Mr. Parsons say he like ver' mooch have you his wife. He damn rich man; take you right away down out of this place. You like that, eh? Dawson — Skagway — Vancouver — New York—you have plenty good time, marry this Parsons. What you say, heh?"

The girl's eyes flitted from the half-breed to the big, brown-faced stranger, swept him over, shifted back. Scorn and astonishment filled her eyes.

"That's a new one," she observed. "If I might ask, how much does it net you, Pottick—if you pull it off?"

"Heh?" he blurted.

"How much do you get out of it? What does he think I'm worth—"

Under his breath Parsons ejaculated admiring profanity. The breed's finger ceased its tattoo, and the pink spots deepened in his yellow-parchment cheeks.

"You plenty fool!" he snarled. "You always little damn fool! This man I tell you my old friend. I see you not like me. I tell him. He make honorable offer."

"Not to me."

"Heh?"

"I said I hadn't heard anything about it. If the man's fallen in love at first sight with a third-class chorus girl, why doesn't he speak up for himself?"

Pottick grinned.

"He will," he said meaningly. "He say plenty 'nuff. He just want me introduce him. He very fine man. I lak much you please him; say yes!"

The girl laughed jarringly.

"You remind me of a man I knew once in Chicago," she said reflectively. "He was going to give me a million some time if he could land it, but in the meanwhile would I stake him to a five-spot?"

"Damn it, will you answer me?" yelled Pottick, thumping the table. "What do you mean?"

"I mean you're crazy. The fellow's a crook for one thing—"

"Heh!" Pottick was on his feet, his face furious.

"Crook! No one calls friends of Pottick crooks! Besides, you forget. Who

are you, anyhow? You come up here last sunset, starve, say you do anything for grub and house. Now—"

The scorn of her voice cut like a white hot wire.

"Yes, anything! I did say that, didn't I? My show went broke in Dawson. You advertised for a waitress. I meant any kind of work—hard, decent work. But of course you couldn't be expected to understand *that!* I'm not so sure, after all, Pottick, if it comes down to taking one of you two, that I wouldn't rather it was you than him!" Her voice, low at first, had crescendoed up into a strident climax.

Swearing hotly under his breath, Parsons leaned forward. "Why," he ejaculated, "I thought you didn't like—"

"Why? That's easy. Because I'd so much less regret killing him after the ceremony!" She laughed again, then without waiting for an answer started off. With a bound Pottick cleared the table and overtook her. His fingers gripped her bare arm savagely.

"Listen girl! You wild-cat of a fool! What can you do? I give you one more chance, by Gar, or else— Say no, and I discharge you! Out on the trail you go—"

"Discharge!" She had drawn herself up fiercely at his touch, starting to jerk away. Like a sail when the wind falls calm, her voice had gone slack then and the mechanically repeated word fell from her lips, half breathed. Eyes open to the whites, breath fluttering, she stared up into his face. But the trembling he waited for as he gripped her did not arrive. Instead, little by little, she stiffened. The blaze of her eyes rekindled. She twitched her arm from his grasp and drew away.

Pottick laughed.

"You goin' say no?" he queried. "What you t'ink best, my dear. You can go where you like—I am tired, anyway, of seeing you around. Eighty mile to the river, hundred more to Sterling. How long you figure it take you, make dat all on foot, eh?"

The girl was quite calm; by all odds the coolest of the three. She let her eyes rest on the breed's for perhaps ten seconds, and laughed. Her voice reminded Pottick of the *ch-a-a-n-g* of a thrown harpoon skidding over ice.

"Very well, Pottick. I guess we three all understand each other. Men are about the same all over. There was a little friend of mine down to New Orleans lost her job once because of a man. He was a big gun in theatrical circles, and he saw to it that she didn't get another. She stood it for about a year, then she—"

The voice that interrupted her was a quiet, unexcited one, proceeding from the corner to which their backs, for the past five minutes, had all been turned. Soft as it was, its suddenness made it startling. By a common impulse all three whirled.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FIGHT AT POTTICK'S.

IT was the youngish stranger who had gone out half an hour earlier. Unseen by the others, he had slipped in again and taken up his post against the wall behind them.

As they turned, he repeated in a cynically drawling way what he had just said. That he was still far from being sobered was obvious at a glance; his voice was thick with the grotesque dignity of half-intoxication.

"I suppose young lady is aware cer'm'ny will be utter fake? No one in Alaska wants gets married. No one in hund'd miles comp-tent perform—"

He was smiling lazily, propped up in the angle between two walls. His thumbs were hooked into his armholes, his slender figure wilted as if it held not a single spark of animation.

As to which of the pair, Parsons or Pottick, first got out his gun is a matter for speculation. There was a simultaneous surge, the muzzles snapped out and up. Two-thirds way they wavered, paused, halted, then wilted down. There had been a stir of the standing figure, a flash, a barked command. The tenderfoot had beat them by a full half-second.

Still smiling, he lurched erect, came forward, held out a hand that did not flicker by a hair, and again retired to his corner.

"Precious pair of scoundrels," he hiccuped. "Never want to see worse!" He broke out the shells and tossed the pistols on the floor. "Little plan 'f yours was dead open and shut, wasn't it, till I happened to—"

"Oh, hell! What can you do?" The snarling voice was Parsons's. "You don't dare shoot, and you're all alone. You're two-thirds soused. How long can you stand off the bunch? They're all with Pottick, and when they do get to you—"

"Sure. Wharf-rats. Skunks. Nest of rattlesnakes. How long c'n I? Minute, maybe. That's enough. All I want is chance to say something." He raised his voice. "Never saw this girl, gentlemen. Nothing to me whatever. I'm drunk, that's all. Pottick's whiskey. Like sporting proposition. Two to one—men to girl—is too big odds. Want make you a proposition. Sporting proposition. I'm on losing side, gentlemen. I'll go you fifty-fifty—"

A roar of hoots and yells from half the now intently listening throng swept his voice away. At the same time, as he begged for quiet, the cheers mingled with laughter of the other half howled to him to go on. From somewhere a stentorian voice outbellowed them all: "Let him say it! We're on! Go to it, bo! Give us the sporting proposition!"

Suddenly as it had started, the uproar fell. The crowd pressed in, forming a close ring about the curious quartet. The youngster, Sanders, still slouched in his corner, and tremorlessly covering the two who somewhat sheepishly, hands half raised, stood before him, went on:

"I make y'n offer. Here's a man wants to marry girl, but she don't want him. Don't blame her. Fellow's a crook. Phony marriage, anyway. Here 'm I. Drunk. Dead broke. Owe Pottick for whiskey and some grub. I'm a bum. Get kicked out anyway to-morrow. I say I won't let that guy have the girl. Fight for her. Bare knuckles, finish fight. All blows fair. Make ring out there, you guys. Guarantee fair play. 'F I win her, I marry her. 'F he does, he can go to hell! Finish fight. Wha d'ye say, boys?"

A roar of laughter, salted with cheers, shook the roof. The big voice started booming, "Sure, Sure! Go to it, Kid." Another took it up, then another and another. The idea tickled the fancy of the crowd.

"What if she won't marry you?" demanded a bunch of three, pushing forward, crimson with laughter.

Young Sanders smiled languidly, and let his eyes rest on the girl. He had put away his gun and his thumb roosted in his belt. She was standing by the table, staring directly at him, a new expression on her face, lips tightly pressed, color heightened even under the rouge. After a second's pause, while their glances fenced, Sanders roused from his slouch, lurched across the ten feet or so that separated them, and hovered at her side.

Laughing, he stopped and murmured an inaudible remark. His arm swept familiarly round her shoulders. As he whispered his lips brushed her hair.

A wave of scorn that even Pottick's offer had not provoked, flashed over her face. She whirled from his embrace, her hand rose spasmodically and crashed, flat open, into his face. The next instant she was ten feet away, her taunt ringing through the room.

"Cad! Even that beast Parsons wasn't drunk! If I've got to choose between you brutes I'd rather take the one that at least looks like a man!"

Laughing, Sanders bowed elaborately to her back.

"Thanks! After I win you, little cat, I'll make you take that back—"

"After you win!" snorted a man in the front of the circle, turning aside to laugh. On opposite sides of the room the fighters had begun to strip. "Look at 'em—that big guy has got him fifty pounds—"

"Seventy!"

"Well, seventy then; and he's half stewed—"

The room was in an uproar. In one corner Pottick whispered earnestly to Parsons. In the middle a self-constituted committee had begun clearing the floor and placing chairs to mark the ring limits.

Farther across, Sanders was getting ready. In a moment stripped to the waist,

he walked out to the ring. Opposite him, in his corner chair, sat Parsons, his seconds busy with the final touches. One of the spectators had volunteered to do a like service for his opponent, but had been waved curtly back.

In the center of the ring Pottick made his announcement.

"These men goin' fight, same as you heard say, gentlemen," he announced. "Winner marries this girl here. Fair fight—nobody else either side but these two. Bare knuckles, no rounds, no referee, no gongs, no time, all blows allowed—no quarter—finish fight. Shake hands."

Parsons advanced, his right extended. The other, hands behind him, lounged forward and waited, six feet off.

"Crab! He won't shake!" howled someone. "Fat-head!" yelled his neighbor. "Half-shot, anyway—doesn't know what he's about."

"Sure—look at 'em! The big one will eat him up!"

No other conclusion seemed possible. Parsons towered a full six inches above his opponent. Although too full-fleshed, his figure was obviously that of an athlete. The corded muscles on his trunk and shoulders, the ropelike flexors and gripping pectorals were the result of no casual development.

As for the youngster, he too was a surprise, and just as certainly a gymnasium product. His figure was lithe, catlike; it was whipcorded and sinewed with knotted bunches and slipping bundles, gliding mouselike under his white skin as he moved about. He was a picture to delight a sculptor. But he was hopelessly outweighed; he seemed sluggish; he was waterlogged with booze.

Parsons, as soon as he sensed the insult of the other's attitude, brushed aside Pottick and rushed in, swinging a pulverizing left. Sanders came to life galvanically. Tense, crouched, set like a sprinter, he sidestepped, ducked, and as he passed under the haymaker, found the wind with a pair of snappy jolts.

Those watching Parsons caught the twinge of his mouth muscles and the sudden slitting of his eyes and understood. It was the beginning and the end of the preliminary sparring. The big fellow had taken his man for a busher and planned to rush him off his feet.

That instant his tactics changed. Covering up with a skill that published instantly the practised boxer, he circled and waited. The youngster with superb footwork danced about, feinting. Parsons did not answer and the crowd booed. The youngster flashed in, got through the big man's guard with a left to the nose, and was away again without a scratch.

Red mounted into Parsons's cheeks and he lowered his crouch a trifle. Again the smaller man bored, raining blows on Parsons's guard. But they were without force. Suddenly the realization came to him—the fellow was lightning quick but he had lost his punch! Grinning, he went after him, guard open, received a pair of straight lefts that were cats' paws, bided his time, and having coaxed the little man close, lashed out.

The blow had a scant foot to travel, yet it pulverized nothing but air. Off his balance, Parsons tottered. A swordlike jab in the plexus brought him up. His counter, hysterically wild, went wide and something like a boulder on an avalanche thundered into his nose.

Dimly conscious of the tumult of shouts that rent the air about him, and of the warm, wet stream that bathed his cheeks and chin, he swung his arms octopuslike and wrapped the little man into a clinch. Holding him with his left, he worked the right like a trip-hammer over the kidneys. It was his meat. With no referee to break the clinch, all blows fair, he would make hamburger of him.

Fast, Sanders might be—despite the booze, might be, and was. But husky as Parsons he was not. The clinch held him. A half dozen more of those wicked, soul-draining wallops, where would his pep be? Almost did a grin wreath itself over Parsons's face, hoots and cursings of the crowd notwithstanding. He heard Pottick reminding them, "All blows fair, no quarter asked or given!"

Then something happened. Around his middle a terrific gripping serpent began

winding, suffocating, second by second, tighter. Forgetting to hammer at Sanders's kidneys, Parsons put his elbow in the little man's face and levered backward.

It seemed to take him off his feet. He stopped jabbing, tried to grip himself down to earth again. He was being lifted, swung clear off his feet by the same scorching band that was constricting his waist. Suddenly he was traveling through the air, backward, Sanders still vised in the circle of his right arm. He released Sanders, twisting like a cat in a mad effort to land on hands and knees, but Sanders's arm held him like a python.

They landed, Parsons underneath, Sanders above. At the instant the little man sprang free and bounded to his feet. Those at the ringside saw that his face was yellow and that he was breathing heavily. The body blows had begun to do their work.

Parsons was rising, first to his knees and hands; then, covering, he shot suddenly to his feet. Sanders rushed in, punished the wind twice with blows from which the steam was gone, started to dance away, and tripped backward. Full length he crashed to the floor, and in the instant the big man sprang. As he did so, a shout left his lips and simultaneously those of the half-breed Pottick. It was a reminder to the crowd—" All blows fair."

Parsons's attack was not one known to any rules of wrestling or of boxing. It was a primitive brute charge, in a life and death struggle; he leaped, crouched and knees bent, for the fallen man's chest. Had he struck fair, he would have crushed the ribs like tinder.

Sanders side-rolled; ever so little, but enough so that the blow was both too high and glancing. Parsons, off his balance, teetered forward on his hands; Sanders, like a flash, was up, and hurled him clean over with a head-lock. On his back, Parsons felt about his neck the deadly strangle hold closing, and squirmed out. He got a toe hold on the little man and lost it. Suddenly, by common impulse, both were on their feet.

All pretense of boxing, of wrestling, of anything else, as such, was gone. Like animals, they circled, crouched, mouths open, breath wheezing in gasps, searching an opening for the finish hold. Time after time, each found his chance, used it, only to have the other wriggle out. Sanders, Parsons soon found, had many a trick of the deadly jiu-jitsu, of which he knew nothing. He had to be feverishly on guard for the subtle innocent-appearing grips that crush and kill.

Time after time he was seized excruciatingly, flung clear, tumbled in a heap, from which he gathered himself up in time to meet the other's following rush. Blows were struck without science, that went thuddingly home on bruised and bleeding flesh. They were no longer planned, purposeful, skilful blows; rather the instinctive lashings out at casual openings of maddened primitives who panted, glared and circled.

Against Sanders's superior speed and skill, Parsons, so long as he fought consciously, pitted his weight, endurance and condition. Eventually, his motions became mechanical. Dimly he was aware of the lighted room, of the sea of faces, of the shouts, all gradually drawing away into hazy distance and unreality.

His instinct told him of an enemy, tiny, virulent, like a deadly insect, ever circling and gathering for a poisonous leap. Sometimes he could make out, with half-closed eyes, his puffed-up face and red splashed shoulders; sometimes he lost sight of him entirely and knew nothing till a subconscious impulse brought him whirling round into a fresh onslaught.

Sanders, wholly the aggressor, fought with brain power, pure and simple. His body had long since become a lump of clay which his will forced nerveless muscles to fling at his antagonist. All sensations had departed. Pain, fatigue, fear and hope were anesthetized, blotted out by weariness. Whether his blows landed, whether he himself was once more battered or flung from his feet, he neither knew nor cared. The mill stretched out into an endless nightmare which his body screamed out to be done with, but which his mind savagely nursed along and gloried in.

The lights made a red aurora, whose rays stung his bleeding eyes. The wall of

faces was a sea of ashen ghost-countenances, which twitched and grimaced soundlessly. The cheers, roars and groans mingled in a surf of sounds that toned with the blood champing in his ears. Somewhere before him ranged the giant, on whom he was to fasten the one last crushing hold.

It was getting so dark, so blinded was he, that he was obliged to feel for him—a savage parody of blind-man's buff. Now his fingers brushed him, his arms swept out, closed on nothing. Came a numbling jolt, an earthquake rocking the roof, and putting out the lights. It grew absolutely dark. The crowd stopped yelling. Knowing that he had done it—had at last beaten Parsons, the youngster collapsed gently on the floor and went to sleep.

It took quite five minutes to calm Parsons. Pails of water dashed over him, the voices of the half dozen men who clung to his arms and shoulders and kept him from raging after his enemy, not knowing, because he could not see, that the naked white and red huddled mass in the corner was all that he had left of him—finally combined to bring him around.

"Can't ye see him?" snarled one of his supporters. "Over there, stretched out on the floor—is he breathing yet, or did ye—Heavens, what a fight! That last smash of yours—"

Pottick stirred the ruin with his toe, turned the face upward.

"Heh! Can't kill him, I guess!" he growled. "Here you"—beckoning the barman and another—"take him and throw him—no, lug him upstairs into one of those empty rooms. *Sacre!* But he is a fighter, the little fool! He shall have time to recover. And all for a woman's face—a damned little painted face—"

He went back to the big man's side. Parsons bleared up at him through terribly swollen lids, and staggered to his feet.

"Well!" he hailed. His grin, through the slashed lips, was horrible. "Well, what did I tell you! He's all in, ain't he?"

Pottick nodded gravely.

"All in—and more."

"Well—where's the girl? I want her. Bring her here."

"I will get her," returned the breed. He turned, beckoned one of the other waitresses, gave an order in a loud tone. The girl disappeared, returned in five minutes and reported breathlessly. Pottick swore, flung her one side and hammered out. When he came in again his face was leathern in stolidity. Only in his eyes burned fierce, wandering lights that he could not quench.

Going up to Parsons, who now, dressed and stretched out on two chairs, impatiently awaited him, he stooped and whispered in the white man's ear. Half-way through, Parsons sprang angrily to his feet, clutching the chair back for support. Out of purple, swollen eyes he glared at the inscrutable face of the half-breed, cursed filthily and staggered by him to the door.

What Pottick had said was the girl, Lucille Hawkes, was gone. She had dropped out of sight. He had searched everywhere and could not find her. The big white man had had all his great fight for nothing. Heh! But they would search everywhere—it was only a question of a short time.

## CHAPTER V.

### DREAMS AND DREAMS.

HAVING fallen asleep, Jack Sanders, who had played gladiator from some quite quixotic and romantic notion that the eyes of the girl called Lucille were a bit too fine, all trappings notwithstanding, to be bartered about profanely—having fallen asleep, Sanders dreamed. He dreamed for centuries, he thought they were agonizing years of being jolted in springless vehicles over ruts and cobbles. He fought endless mills with the villains Pottick and Parsons. He lay down among roadside stones to sleep, his bruises torturing him, while fierce, dim voices wrangled about his fate.

Then the pain ceased. A gentle, cradle-like motion took possession of him. It was as if he were lying at full length in a giant limousine that, swaying gently, purred over polished roads. The stones were gone from beneath him, but he was still sore from

their bruises. He slumbered fitfully, roused now and then by sudden stoppages and by the far-away murmuring of the two voices; but now they were both familiar and very soft. One of them was the girl Lucille's; the other an older woman's, perhaps his mother's. But that was nonsense, for his mother had died when he was born, and he had never known her. A curious sort of peaceful hopelessness began to soothe him. The air was pure, invigorating and scorching cold.

A sudden impulse struck him to get up and walk. He stretched, and his joints and his bruises punished him. His arms were fettered. He knew it because, struggle as he would, he could not move them no more than a half dozen inches. Five minutes he battled with childish desperation, then ceased abruptly and opened his eyes wide.

He saw a black void, spangled overhead with glittering stars. A scud of snow sprayed up from some unseen snowshoe, and tingled in his face. He discovered that he was dressed in fabulous downy furs; he was, moreover, swathed in a bearskin sleeping bag.

Through the desert of snow he was gliding smoothly and quite swiftly. His conveyance was low—not above ten inches from the surface, long, elastic, and yielding to the vagaries of the ground. From ahead came indistinct, labored sounds; of heavy breathing, the *scuf — scuf — scuf* of feet flicking through soft snow, the *whit* of a rawhide whip, guttural monosyllables addressed not to human ears.

Sanders sighed; then sudden mirth assailed him and he guffawed outright. This was not reality, but another dream.

At the sound of Sanders's laugh, the sled stopped abruptly, and the silence was shattered by the snarlings of many dogs. A short, squat figure, in fur trousers and hooded jacket, ambled back, paused between him and the light, staring down. Then he heard a voice, not belonging to the squat figure, but coming from close to his left ear, that exclaimed impatiently and vigorously, demanding to be let up. And at it, a chill of sheer amazement, commencing at the root of Sanders's spine, rocketed up into his hair and back again. It was the girl, Lucille!

But her voice was that of no dream girl; neither was there gentleness in the straining and tugging of feet and elbows. She was hog-shackled just as much as he; they were lashed side by side atop of a huge Esquimaux sled. And whatever relief his feelings might be sweetened with, there was no doubt that she was thoroughly angry and becoming more so with each passing moment of her confinement.

"He's come to life again," she snapped up to the figure that stood over them. "He thinks its funny. He laughed. He's crazy; I'm afraid of him. No one would laugh, out in this place, if he wasn't—"

"Humph! Plenty good keep quiet, both two mouths."

It *was* a familiar voice, though not his mother's, Sanders realized, thrilling. Of course, not that—it was the squaw, old Nalunka! Already, with gruff curses and snapping of the ten-foot thong, she had half turned to line up her dogs again.

"Plenty good not make no noise, someone hear." She finished over her shoulder, "Two moons miles go before come Nalunka's place—"

Sanders felt the tug of the girl's body, straining against the thongs.

"Sixty miles! Let me get up! I've got to walk! I'm afraid of the way he laughs! I'm crazy in this bag!"

"Bimeby, in little while, come Lynx Mountain," responded the squaw, woodenly. "Make camp, two hour, eat, rest dogs. Now you shut up. Make plenty trouble you yell again. White womans like fool blue-jay, screech all time till get shot. You like me use whip, eh, same way on dog?" The crone scuffled a foot nearer, the ugly lash trailing behind, snakelike on the white carpeting. "Eh? Then—"

Sanders, who had just recalled that he possessed a tongue, broke in: "Where are we, anyway, Nalunka? Where are we going? How long have we been out—"

Without replying, the Indian whirled back to her dogs, now in an apparently hopeless snarl of twenty mingled harnesses, and filling the air with a tumult of yaps and snarls.

The girl answered him. Her voice now had a puzzling quality; part of plain, vitriolic scorn, part of a deeper undercurrent of half-relieved curiosity that nettled him. Also subtly, the chorus girl twang, the pert familiarity, had vanished from it. To Sanders's memory these seemed like a burlesque mask that had been laid unnaturally over her true self and was now thrown off.

"So you're not—you're all right, are you, after all?" she said. "I thought at first—*what* were you laughing at—out here in this—"

"What was I laughing at? Oh, nothing much. I got to thinking. You see, I wasn't sure at first whether I was awake or asleep or dead, and it struck me if the folks at home—if people who had never been up here should find out what had been going through my head, they'd say I was nuts—"

"Oh, I see."

"I guess you probably don't. I made a mess of it. I'm afraid my head isn't quite clear yet— Can you—would you mind explaining to me—"

"What?"

"Why, what I asked the squaw—where we are, and why we're here—and—"

There was a pause. The girl's voice was measurably harder when she answered.

"That's funny. I thought maybe you would be willing to tell *me*. Though I suppose that's asking a good deal, and I really don't need any explanations. It was clever of you."

"Eh?" Sanders charged, half erect, forgetful of his lashings, then crumpled back.

"I don't understand," he ventured, a shade unsteadily. "What was it you think so clever of me?"

"What's the use of making believe?" She was poignantly flippant. "The other way's more natural to you. It's not quite as—don't you think it's less contemptible, if you're a cad, to *be* one, and not put on airs as if you had been changed over to a gentleman—just because you're sober—"

"See here!" If her tone had been venomous, Sanders's slashed like a rawhide among flowers. "I'd like to answer you on those two things. Please don't interrupt me till I've had a chance. I'm a little unsteady and I want to get it right. Now, first of all, my cleverness that you're so pleasant over—tell me about it; *I* don't know; I've been asleep, you realize, and drunk—"

Her voice was as low and cutting as his hotly excited.

"Why, if you actually want me to say it, this—this business that's going on now; this *trip*, I suppose you'd call it—so you would keep your hold on me, even if you did lose the fight—as you must have known you would—"

"Lose! I won! But I don't know any more about this stunt than you—probably less—"

The girl laughed curiously. For the first time Sanders caught a mark of emotion in her manner; her head, like his own, started up sharply from the sled floor, hovered a second, settled back.

"Won!" she gibed. "Is that what you thought? That man made hash of you! He pounded you so hard that you've been out for eight hours. It's a living wonder that you've got lungs to breathe. But I suppose it was Providence—the kind they tell about—"

"That watches over fools and drunkards!" he finished bitterly. "Probably. And this is another taste of it. I wish I knew a way to make you believe that it's as great a mystery to me as to you. But even so, you can't help admitting that my intentions were praiseworthy—I fought him so as to—"

"To get me for yourself!"

"To save you from him!"

"Well, suppose you had won; wouldn't you have been just as big a cad? You would have tried to make me marry *you*, wouldn't you?"

"I would have had to do something with you! It would have been only a formality—for your sake. Can't you see that I did—actually—fancy I was doing you a good turn! The lesser of the evils, you know. That chap's a rotten crook!"

"Well, aren't you a—"

"A bum? Possibly. I begin to understand. I'm very sorry. It didn't occur to me that you would actually prefer a rat

like him to—to—that clothes and a beard would figure in a matter as critical—"

Her laugh tinkled out again icily.

"It would have been so much the better," she responded evenly. "I had planned what to do—I should have killed him at the first stop!"

"Well—" Sanders's voice was a trifle sardonic. "Well, what would you have done then? And as far as that goes, you ought not to have told me; there will be plenty—there have been, haven't there, lots of chances—didn't you intend to kill *me*, too?"

She laughed.

"Is that a trap? I suppose now you expect me to say that you are too much of a gentleman to be stuck in the back; and then I'm to go and fall in love with you. I think you're a cad; just as much of a cad as Parsons."

Sanders, shrinking deeper into his fur bag, fancied her lip curling in the dark.

"But anyway, no matter what I think of, the old woman up there will take good care that nothing happens to you—"

"Nalunka, you mean?"

"I believe that's what she calls herself. We haven't gotten to be what you might call chummy yet."

"Has she told you anything—made any explanation?"

"Not a sound. All I have been permitted to know is what has happened."

"You're considerably ahead of me, even at that. Would you mind going over it?"

There was a momentary pause.

"Perhaps," she assented reluctantly, "I might as well; it will give us something to talk about. The first thing that happened was back there when you were busiest with Parsons. Someone—one of the other girls—came round and whispered to me to go out. A woman wanted to see me. In the other room there was the old hag waiting. The minute she saw me shut the door, she pulled her gun—hands up, she said, and not a peep.

"She tossed me a fur coat, made me go out—in slippers—walk ahead of her half a mile till we came to an empty cabin. The windows were boarded up, and she had the key. I suppose that was yours, wasn't it?"

"Eh? My what—my cabin?"

"Of course; why not?"

He flung the answer back hotly: "Because I had just got in! Even Pottick said that. What then?"

"There was a fire in the stove, and a big pile of fur clothes in the corner. The other half of the place was crammed with dogs, most of them asleep on the floor. There was a suit of furs there for me, she said, and I had to dig it out and put it on. The rest she was saving for someone else. I asked her who, and she said the man that was going to get beaten in the fight; the young *chechahco* with the white face."

"Me!"

"Of course. And when she came back with you she told me—"

"She came back with me!" repeated Sanders slowly. "How could she—where was I—did they know? She didn't *carry* me—"

"On her back. Tottered in about half an hour after she had gone away and left me locked up with these dogs, with you over her shoulder like a grain bag. Pottick, it seems, after you had been knocked out, had you carried out and dumped on the floor in one of his empty rooms. She hunted around, found you, got you out without being seen, and lugged you over to the cabin. I wonder if you have any idea of what that fellow did to you? I imagine you've seen faces before, and bodies, that were like raw meat. I never had—"

"You?" he cut in. "You didn't—"

"Oh, yes, indeed. That was part of the old woman's idea. I suppose she thought as long as you had won me in fair fight—"

"Please! You know it couldn't have been any such—"

"I don't. I'm convinced that was it. She held the gun and I—we—undressed you and tied up the worst places. You can imagine it was a charming piece of work. Then together we put the furs on you. Then she made me lie down on the sled, and tied me there. After that she brought you out, laid you side of me, and lashed you on.

"Then she harnessed the dogs and we started off. Not a syllable of explanation, not a human word or look—just grunts to

tell me what to do and to keep quiet. She stopped twice, different places, for half an hour or so. I was allowed to get up and walk around, then tied down again like an animal. She's a perfect fury. If you've got a spark of decency about you, you'll make her turn back—but I suppose that's too much to expect—"

"She's walked, I suppose, all the way?" interrupted Sanders wonderingly. "No chance to ride—"

"Ahead of the dogs. To make a path, you know; the snow's so soft. Nothing seems to tire her."

Sanders did not respond. He lay flat on his back, yielding his mind to a flood of whirling thoughts. The past dozen months had been tumultuous ones; kaleidoscopic with change and adventure. He had been in swift transition from stage to stage of life. Each narrow landing-place had showed him undreamed of vistas of experience; had exposed dizzying heights and depths of human good and evil. At the last he had slipped, gone tumbling from ledge to ledge, defiant of existence, faith in himself lost, throttled by reckless fatalism.

His championship of the girl had been inspired by a grim whimsicality of precisely the same type that had sent him, down and out, will-o'-the-wisping at midwinter into Alaska. Life had become a series of disjointed nightmares, through which he passed, haphazard, like a salmon leaping from pool to pool. Now had come one with a sequel in its punch. It puzzled him utterly. Where they could be going—what object the squaw could conceivably have of lugging, either, to say nothing of both of them, miles into the pathless wilderness of frost by obviously forced marches—he could not imagine.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LYNX MOUNTAIN.

FOR a long time the sled had been moving steadily and slowly up the slope of a ravine. On either side rose steeply shelving walls, covered with spruce trees, with the snow shimmering a sepulchral white background between the trunks.

Occasionally, as the sled made a turn, the tail scraped the base of a huge boulder. Low hanging branches, snow-laden, discharged powdery avalanches into their faces. A dog, flicked too bitterly with the rawhide, occasionally let out a howl. Above, the stars pulsated as if alive in the intense cold. Off to the right, the aurora flaunted its mocking banners of green and pink.

The dogs made a sharp turn about a boulder. On the farther side the squaw, instead of following the trail straight ahead, struck off sharply to the left. It became suddenly dark. A roof blanketed out the sky. The intensified sounds of dogs and runners showed that walls enclosed them.

Nalunka appeared at the side of the sled. She stooped and began fumbling at the knot.

"Lynx Mountain over there," she said. "This cave. Stop little while, few hour, get rested. You plenty better get up, walk round. Bimeby have grub."

"Look here, Nalunka," interrupted Sanders firmly, grasping the old woman's arm as he rose to his feet, "I want you to tell me about this. Where are we going? What's the idea? I think you owe it to Miss Hawkes and to me—"

The squaw twitched her arm away.

"Plenty too much talk make fool. Wise man do, say nothing. Bimeby, get Nalunka's place, she tell. No time now."

Then with a quick, expressive gesture, Nalunka stretched out her arm, pointing back on the trail they had just traversed. Her voice hardened significantly. "What you think, *chechahco?* You think Pottick wait, sleep, not follow us? The owl flies swiftly but the eagle follows. Pottick is bad. Many year Nalunka wait; now time has come to do what she must do. Danger flies behind. Let the *chechahco* and the woman walk and keep their words."

A sharp exclamation escaped Sanders. So Pottick would follow! That lent complications. Yet of course it was obvious enough; he would try to recover the girl. But what object could the squaw have in balking him? And, granting that she *did* have one, how did *he* figure in it?

He gave it up. As he reached the wall

of the cave in his brief walk and turned, a light shone out. From a pile of dry wood in a corner the squaw had started a fire.

She was now feeding the dogs, throwing each a frozen fish from the pile in her arms, which the animals, rising gracefully, caught and dropped down on the ground to eat. The girl Lucille stood watching her a few feet away. Both were dressed in the usual winter garb of the natives; sealskin trousers, covered to the knee with water-tight boots of sealskin, the hide outside, and lined within with downy bird skins; above, two jackets, the inner of fluffy rabbit skin, the outer a hooded *parka* of seal.

The Indian woman again turned to the sled. From the rolled and tied up canvas bundle that had been her captives' foot-rest, she took food; a strip of bacon, crackers, coffee, a can of condensed milk. There were utensils; the few barest necessities for primitive cookery. The coffee pot and fry-pan, she dropped on the ground before the fire and beckoned to the girl.

"Cut meat, fry," she directed briefly, indicating the bacon and hunting knife which she held out. "Nalunka go get water, make coffee. Mooch—"

"Here!" Sanders exclaimed. "I'll do it. You've got no business to speak to Miss Hawkes that way, Nalunka."

"But I'm a prisoner," cut in the girl, stooping to pick up the articles. "I believe it's customary, anyway, isn't it, in Alaska, to turn the drudgery over to the women while the men sit about and talk? The squaw is only doing as she has been taught—"

She had dropped on her knees by the fire and was busy slicing the meat.

Muttering under his breath, Sanders wheeled and strode angrily toward the gray-lighted oblong that marked the entrance to the cave. He heard behind him the sputtering of bacon in the fry-pan and the Indian with a grunt passed him, water pail in hand.

Then he turned. Bent over the fire, intent on her task, the girl did not notice his approach. She was holding out the skillet, as the Indian had showed her, clutching its long wooden handle with both hands. She had thrown off the fur hood of her *parka*, undone the thick garments about the throat. Her hair was tousled; wonderful shafts of yellow bronze glinted from its threads; deeper tones of brown shadowed its depths; into her cheeks, cleansed of cosmetics, the fire had rushed, clean-blooded and crimson. It was a compelling picture; it brought the man up all standing, overwhelmed with a surge of curious feelings.

He started forward rapidly, intending to speak to her. An apology was on his lips. Ten feet away, his noise startled her. She looked up, put down the fry-pan and rose quickly to her feet. He opened his mouth, but she forestalled him.

"I know what you are going to say," she began hurriedly in an undertone of fierce restraint. Her face was tense with anger. "You are going to offer some sickening apologies. You will say you're sorry, and ask me if it is your fault—or something equally disgusting. Please don't! Please don't say a word to me that isn't necessary until—until the thing is over—if it ever is! I don't pretend to understand it—either you or that woman or—or anything else! I don't want to! I'm unutterably disgusted, tired, sick of it! I'll wait till the adventure ends, wherever it's going to; then perhaps I can find a way to pay you for your great services to me—"

"Miss Hawkes!" Sanders begged hotly. Her fierceness had cooled to sarcasm, and that at the last had been flooded out in tears. Face buried in her hands, she knelt there by the fire while the half cooked bacon cooled and grew leathery at her side. "Please!" he vociferated. "Let me tell you just one thing—"

"Heh!" grunted a rasping voice behind them. "Plenty squaw can fry meat, no cry. *Chechahco* woman no good—"

Nalunka had come back with the water.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CONFIDENCES AND CONTRADICTIONS.

NALUNKA had declared that they would stay two hours at Lynx Mountain—long enough to eat and feed and rest the dogs. But immediately on

finishing her meal, she rose, pulled a sleeping bag from the sled, threw it in a corner, climbed inside and closed her eyes.

Sanders and the girl, on opposite sides of the fire, watched her wordlessly. It was evident that the woman required rest—the long trail had fatigued her more than she had anticipated.

The fire had burned low and Sanders stumbled to his feet to bring wood from the corner pile.

The girl beckoned to him, whispering as he leaned near:

"She's asleep. If you want to make me believe in you, get her gun. Then we can make her turn around and take us back—"

Sanders started slightly, hesitated. It was his opportunity—to make good with the girl, to get back if he really wanted to, to halt the wild adventure—

Then he shook his head.

"That proves!" hissed the girl, her lip curling. "It's just as I said—you and she—you're—"

"No. I expected you'd say that, but I can't help it. I don't know why, but I couldn't get myself to do it. It—it isn't square; don't you see that? She's risked—risked everything to get you—and me—away from there. She's playing for big stakes. Somehow, squaw or not, I trust her. Besides, wouldn't you run afoul of Pottick and the other chap?"

Lucille Hawkes's answer was far more expressive than mere words: she shrugged and turned her back. The gesture was cutting in its finality; maddening in the eloquence of its disbelief. Sanders, feeling like a fool and a whipped schoolboy, opened his mouth in numberless ineffectual attempts to say something convincing; then, appalled at the magnitude of the task, lapsed into silence.

For a long half hour of gloomily awkward silence they sat without stirring. The fire made eery tongues of shadows dance over the lofty, distant walls, alternately lighted the girl's face and figure with dull radiance and threw them into blackness: a low star glistened through the square opening. Inside the Indian snored; from beyond the entrance came the snarlings of the dogs.

It staggered Sanders to face the cold actuality of the situation. The strange Indian—the stranger girl—himself, bound in a weird partnership, trekking out blindly into a black and frozen hell. When would be the end? And what form would the danger take—this pursuing peril, personified, in the huge vindictive form of Pottick, whose image was spurring the woman on like a vision of evil spirits? Why did she fear the breed? Why did she hate him? What grim skeleton of the old red days dangled between this pair demanding vengeance?

Impatiently he got to his feet and bestirred himself, cleaning up after the meal. He scoured the tin dishes with gravel, washed them in the remains of water, dried them over the fire and packed them away, with the remains of the food, in the canvas bundle.

Little by little the girl had turned around so as to watch him out of the corner of her eye. She sat by the fireside, knees drawn up, arms folded about them. It gave her a cozy, domestic look, Sanders reflected between the swift glances that he darted at her, made a dozen times more fetching by the piquancy of her trim figure in the sealskin trousers with the snug-fitting knee-high boots.

He imagined the hard look had faded from her eyes, to be replaced by a quite different one. But of course that was nonsense. He brought another armful of wood, flung it on the fire and paused. Seen near to, the girl's figure looked weary and dejected. Her head had slumped forward on her knees; her back seemed limp. There were other sleeping bags on the sled; he longed to have her rest and wondered if he dared mention—

She broke into his thoughts with an abruptness and a wistful mildness that astonished him.

"If we're going to be thrown at each other this way, we may as well say something, don't you think? It's horrible to just sit and stare—talk to me."

"A little while ago," he reminded her gravely, "you told me not to speak to you."

"Did I? Well, this deadness is worse than jollying with your worst enemy. It's actually clammy. Ugh! Tell me something quick. About—yourself."

Her tone was casual. She made the request seem like an order—and for the most trivial, inconsequential thing that occurred to her. Yet a certain light glowed momentarily in her eyes as she glanced at him.

"What about myself?" he demanded. "I'm afraid there isn't much you would approve—"

"Oh, about anything—where did you learn to fight so well, for instance? You must have had training. That man was twice as big as you, but for a long time I thought you were going to—"

Sanders laughed shortly and dropped to a seat on the ground.

"I've wasted a good deal of time," he countered, "not to mention money. That was one of my hobbies—both were, for that matter. I went in for athletics."

"Where?"

"Where? Oh, various places. Boxing at New York, wrestling at Baltimore, jiu-jitsu at Tokyo—"

"Then you have been abroad?"

"Yes." Sanders was obviously annoyed with himself.

"Where? Tell me about it."

"Where? Oh, I don't know. Knocking around, pretty much all over. I had a spell of it, you know, same as I did—everything else. There were a few years—"

"Yes?"

"That—I was like the rest of them, only worse, I suppose. So long as I had money in my pocket, the thing was to get rid of it."

"Well—have you found out differently—I mean, when did you change your mind?"

He looked at her keenly.

"What makes you think I have?"

"A man doesn't come into this place, alone, without money, in winter, just for fun. I heard you tell Pottick you were broke. That fellow Parsons was trailing you. You—"

"Parsons trailing me! I wondered. It seemed as though I had seen him—I couldn't remember—"

"When did you begin to drink?"

"Eh? That's not—I beg your pardon!"

"Don't! I know it isn't. But you haven't always been a boozer."

"How do you know?" he demanded curiously.

"It would have killed you as an athlete. You're still fit. It was—"

"No, it wasn't," he interrupted. "It wasn't anything recent. It was a part of the whole; though it's true I didn't go in for it so much till—"

"You went to college," she put in abruptly.

Sanders delayed a moment before answering.

"How did you know?" he challenged guardedly.

"I can't tell. But you're father was wealthy; then he lost his money—suddenly."

"How did you know that—the last part particularly?"

"Because you went to pieces. But there was something else—a—"

He interrupted her.

"You're too generous!" His sarcasm was at himself, a fine, razor-edged sneer. "I did go to smash, but not at a calamity. I fell in pieces because I hadn't strength to hold together. If you must know you're about right. I was—I am—an utterly worthless piece of human furniture. I had a handful of parlor virtues, a shellac of decent manners, tons of money, unlimited opportunities. No man was ever better fitted out, and none kept himself busier throwing his goods out of the window. I traveled; I gambled; I drank; I—

"Your profession, now that I think of it, has probably brought you in touch with men in various stages of the toboggan, so that I can spare you the details. I came into Alaska almost in a dream. I had a hunch only—a wild, impossible hunt for a name I had once heard. If I didn't find it—well, there are thousand of skeletons scattered about this pretty country whose former owners had a heap more claim to love, honor and obedience than I—"

"And yet you had enough," the girl murmured thoughtfully, "to go up against a man who looked able to break you in two"—her voice held a peculiar soft, musing quality—"for the sake of a painted chorus girl whom you had never seen—"

"It was a whim," he interrupted flip-

pantly. "It appealed to my gambling instinct. I once saw a man in the Congo jump into the Zambesi Falls just to carry out a wager. It was a trifle, too; merely as to the number of wives in the native chief's harem. Of course, though, the fellow was a wreck—and full of dope. Men get lonely in the wilds; I was so drunk I didn't know what I was doing. And that chap Parsons went against me— What did you mean by saying I had claim enough to love and honor?"

"You said you were trying to find a name," the girl interrupted hastily. "I heard you mention one to them—to Pottick and the other one. They were talking about it afterward. And Nalunka was muttering over something as we were fixing you up—it sounded like a king's name I once heard: an old Egyptian, wasn't he—"

Sanders leaned forward, fixing her sharply.

"What was it?"

"The king? Midas; there was a story about him, I think?"

"Yes. Not Egyptian; Phrygian. He had wonderful fingers; everything he touched turned to—"

"Gold!"

"Yes— So I said Midas, did I? I wonder how much else? And Pottick repeated it."

"And Nalunka. Is there a story? Can't you tell me?"

Sanders sprang to his feet hurriedly.

"There may be; if there is I don't know it—not much of it. I merely heard enough to—to take a drunkard's chance—"

"As you did on me?" she pursued with a whimsical perverseness new to her. "Was it only that? Wasn't there the least bit of—chivalry?"

Sanders laughed gratingly.

"Wouldn't it sound presumptuous for me to claim that? Not so long ago, you yourself put me in a quite different class. I'm afraid you're having fun with me. Suppose we don't bother any more with motives. We're here; what are we going to do about it?"

Turning his back, he strode the twenty or more feet that separated him from the cave's mouth and stood in the doorway. The talk with the girl had flustered him. It enraged him to realize how easily she had wormed the skeleton from his closet; and without disclosing a word as to herself. But one word she *had* brought to him—Midas—Midas!

To him, all his life, it had been a magic word, the symbol of a talisman. It was on everyone's lips—even Nalunka, the old hag, who had sworn there was no more gold on Goose Creek, had mouthed it over as she tied up his wounds! And come to think of it again, why should she take all that pains with him—unless she imagined that he possessed knowledge of a secret that she might be anxious to unravel? He laughed grimly. The only knowledge he had was a pipe-dream!

When Sanders, after many minutes, turned about into the cave again, the girl was stretched out by the fire, asleep, as were the old woman in the corner and the dogs outside. Pulling out a sleeping bag, Sanders laid it carefully over her and piled fresh wood on the fire.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MIDAS.

IT seemed to Sanders that hours upon hours dragged away. Three, in fact, did. Between cat-naps he roused, tossed on fresh wood, and saw that the two women were still asleep.

He drifted at last into sound slumber, from which a fierce medley of noises roused him. He sprang to his feet, dazed. The fire had burned out, the cave was black and deadly cold.

Grasping a stick of firewood that lay at his elbow, he slipped out of his bag and stole to the door. Then he threw the weapon down. It was the squaw, Nalunka, who had wakened and gone out to harness the huskies, and was now kicking and clubbing them into obedience.

Seeing him, she came up and grasped his arm. The dogs were at last settling down to ill-humored quiet and on the open knoll, twenty feet away, where she led him, the silence was almost perfect.

She lifted her hand. "Listen!" she bade.

Sanders pushed back his hood and held his breath. For a moment nothing; then from afar off, back on the trail, a slender, strident, mysterious sound floated in. A thrill chilled him. It was a sled-dog's howl!

He shot a glance at the Indian woman. Her lips were tight, the gashed lines in her face more darkly bitter than ever. She uttered a low laugh.

"Heh! the evil one follows!"

"You mean it is—"

"Pottick!" She swept her arm. "His camp back there—two—three mile."

"Won't he catch us before we get there—wherever it is you are going?" demanded Sanders.

The Indian chuckled.

"He could, but he will not. He does not want to."

"Why?"

The squaw started to turn away, then paused.

"He is clever. He is the fox, creeping up with stealth. For twenty years he tries to catch me. If he jumps too soon he knows that he will spoil the game. He waits till the last minute. Then—the game will not be there!"

There was to Sanders an indescribably grim note in the old woman's mockery, as if the festering hatred of a score of years of suffering, of patient, stoic waiting, of watching, scheming, planning, was coming to a head. And this mad expedition was to be the occasion. It seemed that his own presence, utterly chance-driven as it was, the girl's, the fight, had given Nalunka the opportunity she had waited for so long!

Utterly mystified, in the thrall of his leaping fancies, Sanders shivered and retraced his steps to the cave.

Lucille had come out; without having been asked, she was helping the Indian load the sled. In a moment, Nalunka leading, they swung out on the trail.

To the tenderfeet, Sanders and Lucille Hawkes, the silence was dizzying. At a stretch of good walking, the girl, who was ahead, fell back to Sanders's side. Her manner was curiously different from the previous day. She looked up at him half timidly and whispered:

"Isn't it awful? This lonesomeness—and the mountains—and the cold! It frightens me so. And where are we going? Don't you truly know?"

It was apology; more—it was surrender; acknowledgment that she had been wrong all through, and it brought with it a confession of confidence and comradeship that thrilled the man.

Sanders shook his head.

"No more than you."

The girl said nothing for a moment. Then she went on: "And after we get there, won't Pottick and—whoever he had with him—catch up and find us, and—"

Sanders hesitated. Evidently she had not heard the sound from their pursuers' camp, and since the squaw had thought best not to tell her, he decided to follow suit. Later he wished devoutly that he had done otherwise.

"I don't know, I'm sure. This is Nalunka's party. Some way, I feel inclined to hand it to her—I believe she knows what she's about." He smiled a little. "I wouldn't worry too much if I were you, Miss Hawkes. In a way, this is a unique experience, you know. Sixty miles through the heart of the white desert in midwinter, co-captive with a penniless hobo, chaperoned by a Siwash squaw. Make the most of romance while it lasts—and look at that sun!"

After its hour of light, the sun was setting. Gradually the light had faded; following it came the peculiar, powdery twilight so everlasting, and so trying to the nerves of the newcomers.

As the darkness thickened, the girl hovered more and more closely to Sanders's shoulder. After a while, she slipped her hand under his arm and clung to him. They went on thus for miles without speaking.

Eventually the trail ceased its steep upward trend and ran level for some distance. Then it began to dip sharply downward. They had crossed a divide—probably the summit of a pass over a mountain range—and were descending the opposite slope.

It was then that the Indian woman halted and spoke.

"Eighteen mile more, Nalunka's house," she told them. "Stop here, eat, feed dog, and rest little while."

The place was in the open; an island of cold rock and snow, on which they stood surrounded by a sea of haze and purple hummocks.

They ate sitting on the sled, accompanied by the crunching and snarling of the weary dogs. There was no cooking; they had hard biscuits and cold bacon, fried hours before in the cave back at Lynx Mountain.

"Now lie down, sleep" ordered Nalunka when they had finished.

They did so, in the bearskin bags. The dogs were still worrying, voicing their woes with an occasional howl. Sanders, curled up in his bag, caught his imagination reaching out and back along the trail for the angry, stumbling figures of Pottick and his crew. He visualized their coming up and catching them asleep; the fight; the eventual disaster.

He drew his breath sharply. He had been asleep a long time, dreaming, and something had wakened him. Without realizing it, he had started bolt upright, sleeping bag and all, every muscle tense, staring into the ten feet of darkness that separated him from the girl. She was breathing quietly, as was the Indian. Not a sound came from the dogs.

Sanders shuddered. His fancies had gotten hold of him.

From behind there was a gentle rustling. He heard the sound of heavy breathing, of a muffled grunt. Hampered by his bag, he half turned. A huge form towered over him, shutting out the stars; a hot breath scorched his cheek.

Flopping like a rabbit, Sanders plunged up and grappled with the man. But his feet were tangled and he was dull with sleep. Under the vast bulk that surged on him he went down; over and over. A cold, hard object crashed on his head, but the thick fur of his hood muffled the blow.

They were on the snow, scrambling, fighting like cats, giving and taking hammer-blows. Sanders warded off a rain of crashes from the pistol-butt; time after time he tore away fierce, strangling fingers that fumbled at his throat.

Parsons had gone ahead to subdue Nalunka, who had awakened too late and whom he caught, knife in hand, swarming out of her bag. Leaving the woman half stunned and muttering, he ran back to Pottick. It was his pistol snout that Sanders felt digging in his ribs.

"All through, bo," snarled the big man, "unless you wanta—"

Sanders threw up his hands.

"You win," he snapped. "What do you want?"

"Pack any cannon?"

"No."

Up ahead Pottick was railing at Nalunka.

"Where is the owl now, old fool? It is only a fat goose without brains that goes to sleep in the middle of the trail with the wolves running up behind!"

To Sanders's astonishment it was derision rather than chagrin at having misread her enemy's plan and having been caught unawares, that tinctured the old woman's answer.

"Heh! The wolf would eat eggs, and now he has killed the bird!"

"What do you mean?"

The old woman made a gesture of contempt.

"I mean you are a fool, Pottick. If you was clever you would creep behind me quiet like fox, wait, see what I do when I not know you there. But now you find out nothing because I not goin' where I started. I goin' back to Black Goose."

A slow smile crept over Pottick's face.

"You goin' mooch ahead!" he contradicted softly.

The squaw grunted.

"How can you make me?" she scoffed. "I remember a birch tree with fire in the chips around the bottom; but I did not tell you anything. My brother I saw with a red sign on his breast and his eyes turned up at the stars. That was one more murder on your soul, Pottick, and you did not find out the secret."

For a moment the half-breed hesitated, then his smile broadened.

"All right, Nalunka; that is true enough, I suppose, but look a minute; look at this *chechahco* here with his hands over his head. He is not a very handsome man; he can fight a little, it is true, but he has no money. However, you take an interest in him. You make a lot of trouble for your-

self to get him away from me and bring him up here. Well!" The big man's voice tightened like a steel wire; it became very soft, vibrating with a purring sound of inexpressible fury. He leaned close to her. "What is he to you, this *chechahco?* Why do you bring him out here? How much would a scream of his mean in your ears? Suppose I tie him to this tree and let you sit there and look on while we kindle a fire at his feet—"

Nalunka interrupted him with her cry. It was more than a scream. It was the shriek of an animal in mortal fear, it was the wail of tortured love into which were compressed years of agonized suspense of unfed longing.

"Enough, Pottick! I go!" she cried.

The breed, astonished, in spite of himself, at his success, grunted shortly and motioned ahead to the dogs.

"Then harness—mooch!" he ordered.

The girl Lucille had cried out tensely at the Indian's shriek, and Pottick, as though just reminded of her presence, snapped out an exclamation and started off toward her.

Sanders, with a shout, sprang forward and would have blocked his way, but Pottick dragged him back.

"The *chechahco* who is wise," he sneered, "respects both the man whose fist is heavier than his own and him who has a gun. Walk 'side of me and keep your mouth closed, white man."

The dog teams fell into line, Nalunka at the head leading them both. Behind her came Pottick and Sanders; at the rear Parsons kept close to Lucille Hawkes.

In the silence of the going snatches of the talk between these two drifted ahead to Sanders. The man was flippant, cynical, leeringly suggestive or brutal, according to his whim; the girl uniformly brief and ripe with loathing.

Bitterly as it wrenched Sanders's control to hear this and yet do nothing, he had the good sense to contain himself. Talk and nothing more, he realized, would do no real harm. What filled him with grave forebodings was the thought of the time when their journey would be finished, and, having arrived at whatever place they were headed for, they would go into camp.

As Sanders plodded on he gave himself up to making a careful analysis of their position, trying to forecast the run of chances and the possibility of finding breaks to be turned their way. And that, he reflected subconsciously, was precisely what each member of his party was doing at the very moment. His party! The words struck him curiously. To think that in so brief a time the three, who had started out on this wild, mysterious errand, had been drawn together, from suspicion and distrust, into such a thrilling partnership!

Hour after hour, bent, silent, pondering, they plodded on. Eventually, in the everlasting powdery twilight, they came out on the brow of a steep descent. They could look dimly across a narrow, deep ravine to a flat-topped low hill. The gully running between the two made a wide three-quarters turn about the base of the knoll and then dropped suddenly down into black, bottomless depths.

Pushing down, they crossed the frozen stream that filled the bottom of the narrow valley, and climbed the rounded slope of the knoll. Possibly two feet of snow was on the ground. Under this covering, the surface of the hill was knotted, warted, piled up with heaps of earth, some small, others towering above their heads. Innumerable holes and gullies criss-crossed. On the exact summit of the elevation appeared the largest pile of all—a typical heap of mine excavations, with hoisting derrick still in place, and a few feet distant, the shaft opening itself.

Less than a hundred feet off appeared a cabin. It had been built well, of matched logs, the spaces filled with moss and clay, making it weather-tight. There were even glass windows, all astonishingly whole, and a plank door closed and secured by a clasp and wooden staple.

A curious sensation thrilled Sanders as he took in the details. An abandoned mine; a substantial, weather-worn cabin, sunk in the wilderness. His mind flashed back to other things: a hotel proprietor to whom the girl had assured him he had maudlinly uttered a name; a squaw who had mumbled the same name as she dressed his hurts; a squaw who had assured the hotel man that

there was no gold in a thousand miles, and then had kidnapped him to bring him here; still further back a sea of half-recollections, of dreamlike memories almost buried in the shuffle of thoughtless years. He felt himself begin trembling. His lips were dry and he moistened them.

Both sleds had come up and stopped, the strange dogs snarling at each other.

Pottick was at his elbow, shooting swift glances, first at him, then at the squaw.

Nalunka, oblivious to the others, was looking up at him and her eyes glittered. She was waiting for him to speak.

Sanders gripped her arm, his face flushing crimson, then white.

"Nalunka!" he demanded, "what is this? You don't—it isn't possible—"

"Humph!" The old face for once beamed, and the fierce voice was gentle. "This Midas. You John Sanders."

Sanders tottered. Midas it might be: the goal of his years of blind, mad travels, but—he had told his name to no one but Pottick; and surely the latter would not have bothered to tell the Indian! Yet— Sanders remembered how the breed had taunted her; and it had been the reference to him that broke her down. Why? How had she known him? What was he, John Sanders, a white American, aristocratic, college bred, to this brown-faced aborigine?

And more than that, what was Lucille Hawkes to either of them?

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## CHAPTER IX.

### NALUNKA'S STORY.

SANDERS'S gaze dropped to the face at his side. It was the girl, Lucille.

"She said 'Midas'!" she breathed. "That was the name you whispered—was what Nalunka kept saying over when she was fixing you!"

"Yes. It was the name of a mine. It was a very famous one—once. I have been trying for—for a long time to find it." His voice was awed, as if he could not believe in the reality of what he saw.

"You knew the name, but not where it was?" she questioned. "Wasn't that funny!"

"I knew the name and that was all," he corrected in a voice, suddenly flat. "I heard it. I've been two years hunting it. And it wasn't funny—"

She drew away a step, abashed. In a moment she inquired:

"Did you—did anybody—tell Nalunka your name? She got it right, didn't she? How did she know?"

Sanders looked at her queerly.

"I don't know how she knew—and I don't understand why I'm telling you all this—John Sanders was my father. He located this claim, found a pocket or two of fabulous richness, and—" He threw his hands aside in a hopeless gesture.

"And—" prompted the girl.

"And went off and forgot it."

"Without working it?"

"Yes."

"But it *has* been worked! See all the holes and the machinery! Somebody else got the—"

"Most likely." Sanders's tone was dull. For months he had lashed his courage into action with the half-insane hope of finding the old claim, unworked and virgin, as he had supposed it to have been left. Now that he had stumbled on it, through no skill of his, it was rat-holed with other men's tunnelings, and he and the girl he had come to love were at the mercy of a pair of as perfect human wolves as the Northland ever was cursed with.

He turned to the squaw.

"See here, Nalunka," he began wearily, "this isn't Midas. My father owned Midas and it was never worked. This claim has been scraped clean—"

Pottick broke in with his soft laughing. "Midas has been worked!" he scoffed. "Dere's been a hundred fellers—"

The old woman shot the young fellow a look.

"You John Sanders." It was not a question; it was an assertion of the utmost positiveness. "Dis Midas mine. Your father, he John Sanders, he stake it; yes."

"Did you know my father?" demanded Sanders.

The woman nodded.

"Yes; I know him. That how I know you his son."

"How's that?"

Nalunka looked up, smiling curiously.

"The eagle and his son are the same face; the Siwash does not forget."

"You mean you recognized me because I looked so much like him?"

"Yes. And because you say the name—"

"Midas?"

"Yes."

"Well, even so. I don't see the use of all this. The thing has been worked—all the gold taken out—hasn't it?"

"Yes," Nalunka said. "Dere not enough pay-dirt in a hundred miles to yellow the point of a pick—"

Pottick, who had been listening attentively, a yellow grin gashing his face, broke in with an oath.

"Hell's lies, old woman! That game's played out. We're here at last. Now you've your last chance."

With an inscrutable look the squaw held up her hand, her face all at once stolid in its leathery folds.

"Too much talk now, no good. Too dark. Come in, fix house, eat. Pretty quick something happen. Bimeby talk."

They entered the cabin. It was a typical one-room miner's hut, desolate and bedraggled with the disuse of twenty years. The sheet-iron cook-stove stood across from the door, midway of the opposite side. Before it was a rough table. Several chairs lined the walls. Above them, bright-colored lithographs hung in tatters, faded and curled from summer moisture. Spiders' webs festooned the walls and window-panes. The stove was red with rust. Under-foot, that wonder of wonders in the Arctic, a hewn plank floor, was still in good condition.

A cupboard nailed to the wall to the right of the table contained a generous collection of crockery; pans and kettles hung from the nails beneath. Across the room a row of boxes and barrels marked the owner's place of food storage.

Dully striving to realize that all this had once been his father's, Sanders strolled over and raised the covers. Some of the receptacles were half full, others less; none were empty. The food had soured, mildewed, decayed into shapeless masses. He shot an inquiring look at the Indian woman.

"Left in a hurry, didn't he?"

Nalunka appeared not to have heard. She was showing the cooking utensils to the girl, taking each from its hook, holding it up to be admired from all sides, and carefully replacing it. Then the dishes came in for their share; lastly, the windows, whose panes she tapped gently with a forefinger, smiling in childlike pleasure.

A quarter of an hour later a fire was roaring in the ancient stove. Lucille and the squaw, their hooded *parkas*, as well as the outer of the two pairs of sealskin trousers, laid one side, were busy at the table. Nalunka was showing the girl how to make corn-cake. But, as Sanders observed with a flash of amusement, the pupil was already going her teacher one better; she insisted on washing and scouring the baking-tins before pouring the batter into it! The three for a moment were alone.

Then Parsons and Pottick, having fed the dogs, came in, pulled off their outer *parkas*, and dropped heavily into chairs, eying the women curiously as they moved about.

The half-breed's look was fastened on the old Indian, and in his eyes smoldered the same sullen fire that her nearness always woke in them. It was the yellow glare of a crouching tiger, waiting for his prey to come a single foot nearer before he springs.

Parsons's roving eyes never left the figure of Lucille Hawkes as she busied herself about the meal. The girl's fur jacket was open slightly at the neck, showing her white skin; her sleeves she had rolled up to her elbows. The big man had lighted his pipe, then forgotten to pull at it, and sat staring wolfishly at her. His face was puffed horribly, like a tree-trunk toadstool; it was blotched with purple and dark-brown spots; his eyes, still half-closed, were mere red-rimmed slits with green and yellow pouches underneath, where Sanders's fists had reached home.

Sanders himself, standing back against the wall across the room, watched the pair narrowly, thinking fast. Both were up there for their prey; each was indifferent to the other's doings. There was no hope

that mutual jealousy would keep them fencing, and stave off the crash. It was in the air that either could go ahead in his own way, when he thought best, without interference from the other.

Lucille Hawkes, carrying the coffee-pot, passed close to Parsons. The big fellow's hand twitched, hesitated, shot out toward her wrist, fell short. Grinning, he looked around at Pottick. A huge yellow smile was spreading over the breed's face, lifting to show the fangs of his white teeth. He nodded lazily.

"I tell you she damn fine girl, heh—" he began; then stopped. Without a word Parsons had tipped his chair forward and stood noiselessly on his feet, his great back bowed. The girl was a little way off, turned from him, busy at the stove.

Parsons took a step, moistened his lips, then stopped abruptly. Sanders, standing scarcely to his shoulder, had slouched up from his place in the corner and shoved before him.

"If you touch the girl," snapped the smaller man, "I'll kill you, Parsons!"

Parsons laid his pipe down on the table and peered down curiously at the other's face.

"Hell!" he sneered. "You! Haw! Didn't I almost do the job for you back there? What do you think you can put over now?"

"I don't know," said Sanders evenly. "You've got everything with you, I admit, but I'll find a way just as I did before. Go ahead, if you like. Try it—I'll meet you half-way—"

Parsons's face blackened.

"I'll find out, will I? Then I'll find out now, you soused little fool! I'll break you in two! That 'll be one less to keep watch of."

The immense hands hanging at his sides worked spasmodically; his face was black with rage, eyes staring white. He came forward silently, crouched. In the hush that filled the cabin, Sanders realized that every one had gone motionless. Then, at last alive, Sanders sidestepped, moved a trifle into the room for leeway.

A form came between them. It was the half-breed, Pottick. With a dry laugh he pushed the furious Parsons back.

"Wait!" he said. "No time for fight now. Too hungry." His smile broadened. "Smash up cabin; maybe you hurt some one else, too." He put his lips to the other's ear and whispered a few words.

"Bimeby—"

Scowling and suspicious, Parsons let himself be pushed back. He picked up his pipe and leaned against the opposite wall, darting stinging glances out of his puffy eyes.

Pottick went back to his seat, tilted against the wall and chuckled softly.

A few minutes later they sat down to supper. The meal seemed almost civilized; they were at a table, sat on chairs, ate warm, freshly cooked food with knives and forks. The stove-top glowed red-hot, the tea-kettle hummed on the corner.

But the atmosphere of the tiny room was tense. Murder was in the hearts of the two who had overtaken Nalunka's party. Murder and worse. On the threshold of the secret he had hunted so fiercely, black Alan Pottick held his hand from the Indian only so long as in her life remained the key of it. As for the youngster, Sanders, both he and Parsons trifled with him, in their thought, as a huge cat does a mouse. One thing first was all-important. After that—

The picture was no strange one for the grim north night to cloak in shadow. Many a such had the wild Yukon known, where man's law is a scoffing and a joke and the might of the strong triumphs over the feeble and the unarmed.

Of the five seated about the table not one failed, in varying degree, to sense the threat.

Lucille Hawkes, white and puzzled, shot quick questioning glances at the Indian and at Sanders, and made a flat failure of her eating. Sanders, whose elbow brushed that of the man who had just announced his intention of breaking him, scowled into his cup and tried to see ahead one move into the future.

Only the Indian, Nalunka, ate heartily and without embarrassment. Could it be, Sanders wondered, that even in this hellish mess, she had trumps high enough to laugh at threats?

When the meal was finished there was a

significant pause. For the hundredth time Parsons fastened his foul look on the girl, Lucy, making her go red, then white, and setting Sanders's fists to itching. But Pottick sprang to his feet and whirled the Indian woman roughly from her chair.

"Now, old goose," he snarled, "now take us to it. Show John Sanders the treasure that his father gave you to keep for him twenty years ago."

"Treasure!" she scoffed. "Who said treasure? Did I? Did any one but Pottick? John Sanders came and dug gold and went away. Who knows that he left any hidden—"

Pottick interrupted, speaking with terrible deliberation.

"Treasure or not, there is something here you've watched with all your life. No more words. Are you ready, or—"

Nalunka sank into a chair.

"Too dark," she said. She held up the fingers of one hand. "Five hours, sun come. Till then, sleep. But first Nalunka tell a story." She began abruptly, looking straight at Sanders.

Her tone was suddenly harsh, as if it crushed back emotions that crowded too bitterly for expression. The candle-light, flickering over her deeply graven face, brought out a curious expression. The flat primitive features were alight with a kind of exaltation—as of devotion to a duty she held sacred.

She seemed to have forgotten the presence of Parsons and of Pottick, who, after a moment, dropped into chairs, smoking and listening sneeringly.

"Many year back your father came here, stake out mine, build cabin. Then he young man, like you. He handsome, gray eyes, always shave smooth, speak gentle, not like other miners. Dis ver' reech country den; gold ever'where, many mans come, dig much dust, take it home with him. But dis claim richest anywhere round. Plenty bad man find out 'bout dis claim, try kill your father—"

"But my father wasn't killed here," interrupted Sanders. "It was two years later, after he got home—"

Lucille, watching the squaw intently, saw the fingers of her hand close convulsively. It was an infinitesimal gesture; her face was masklike.

"Your father killed," she reiterated mechanically, "two year after go from here?"

"Yes, in a railroad accident. He had been planning to go back to this mine; he was on his way from New York to Vancouver—"

"Dat why," she whispered, as if to herself. "Nalunka wonder twenty year—"

"Why, what?" demanded Sanders. "What have you been wondering about for twenty years, Nalunka?"

"Why he not come get—gold dust—"

"Gold dust!" cried Sanders. "Why, the mine was never worked—my father never did, I mean. That was what he was coming back for—"

"Humph! John Sanders live here two year, work mine all time. But no one see him take out gold when he go 'way." She waved her hand contemptuously. "He too clever for dat."

"But my father didn't take any dust with him when he went out, did he?"

"Your father go in beeg, beeg hurry, say he come back. Everybody know he not take dust. Everybody know he work two year, t'ink he must have dig out lot. So dey t'ink maybe he hide it, dey come and dig. All but—Pottick!" The woman did not look at the breed as she said his name, and a dull grunt was the only sign he gave.

"And Pottick?"

The crone was silent. Her black eyes that had been melting with some strange mellowness of the recollections blazed out like a panther's.

"Pottick! Dose man, he t'ink your father hide his dust; he t'ink I know where he put it."

"Why should you know?" broke out Sanders. It was a question he had been fidgetting to ask for a quarter of an hour. "Why should he think you knew, I mean? You do know a great deal, don't you?"

"Over dere"—she waved her hand behind her—"I show you where we come, you remember, over dere by falls, Nalunka's house. I young girl, den; my tribe have village here on creek. I see your father every day. All my tribe see him. Dey all dead now."

"And just because of that, Pottick said you knew—"

The woman closed her eyes momentarily.

"He say I know," she repeated stolidly.

"Did you?"

"I tell him no. He say I lie. He say if I don't tell he have me burn—"

"Burned!"

The Indian drew in her breath sharply.

"He say I damn good-for-nothing savage; cut up and feed to dog. He say tie me to tree and burn. He—"

"He didn't—oh, he didn't dare to hurt you, did he?"

It was the voice of Lucille Hawkes, sharply drawn and shuddering with horror.

The Indian said nothing, but her reply was dramatically eloquent. Stooping, she undid her sealskin boots and drew them off, then the short socks of wool. Her trousers she rolled up; the inner pair of seal-hide, worn with the fur within. Simply, unashamed, she held out her legs, beckoning to the girl to bring the candle closer.

They were seamed, feet and calves, with long ribbonlike scars, which in places rose above the knees. The feet were gnarled, distorted, knotted out of shape.

She held out her hands; the palms were laced, eaten, corroded, like the surface of a lake of lava.

"He not quite kill me," she smiled grimly, "because if he do, he sure to lose gold. That many year ago. All time since den he watch, watch, t'ink maybe I come back here. Den he goin' follow, see where I go. Now, odder night, you come, say name Midas—say you look for pay dirt."

"Yes," he mused. "All my life, from my aunt who cared for me—my mother died when I was born—I had heard just that name—and nothing more. They knew there was a fabulously wealthy mine; they thought he had not worked it. It was in Alaska—somewhere. He had never told them exactly."

"Yes," she went on, "and after fight I take you, go fast. Of course—"

Sanders interrupted, his voice choked with awe.

"Nalunka—if you did know where the gold was—why did you let him torture you and not tell?"

"John Sanders say he come back," she answered simply. "I promise him keep secret, not tell no one."

"But you are telling us now—Pottick here, and everybody."

"When I see you at Pottick's, I know you John Sanders's boy. So I bring you here. Pottick come, too; well, I not tell him anything now he no know before!"

The breed clattered to his feet.

"No, damn you!" he cried. "But—"

The Indian woman pulled a pair of sleeping-bags from the pile, and beckoning to Lucille Hawkes, started for a narrow door in the rear corner of the cabin.

"Sleepy," she explained. "Bimeby, five hours, get rested, I show you something."

In a moment the women had disappeared and the heavy door was slammed and hooked behind them.

Muttering a soft-syllabled oath in Eskimo Pottick glanced around.

"Might as well get a rest, too, hadn't we?" suggested Parsons. "Or we can take turns keeping awake—"

"I sleep first, you watch," decided Pottick. "Two hours call me, then you sleep."

In five minutes the two, Sanders and Pottick, were stretched out on the floor. Powers, tilted back in an armchair, with his feet in another, smoked and nursed his automatic.

The candle guttered down, sputtered and went out. The wood fire in the stove soon followed suit. It was utterly black in the little room. After a while the moon rose and sent in a dust of pale blue light, so that Sanders, lying wide awake and thrilling in his bag, could make out the dim bulk of the nodding guard and the still vaguer outline of the giant on the floor.

## CHAPTER X.

### ESCAPE.

SANDERS would have said he lay for hours, listening and waiting. The cabin was noiseless but for the twin sounds of breathing: Pottick's soft and easy, with the perfect regularity of the outdoor liver: the city man's heavy.

Pottick certainly was asleep, Sanders decided. He peered up at Parsons, huddled like a great dog in the gloom, his chin on his chest. That the watcher would doze off, he had been certain all along; each moment it seemed that he had done so and the time had come. For only too clearly Sanders understood that once day had come, and the mystery of Nalunka's expedition was cleared up, the crisis would thunder down on them. In that next struggle Pottick's whim would certainly not again lead him to interfere; he would have his own affairs. Sanders, weakened, stiff and unarmed, would stand alone between Parsons and the girl.

Moment by moment the thing grew on him. He would do his utmost, and obviously in vain. There was but one way to head off disaster. His duty was clear, and the same moral law that would make it right for him, if possible, to strike down Parsons in the fight, justified him, he decided, in the plan he was going to take advantage of the darkness to carry through.

For a long time the big man had not changed his position. His pistol lay on his knees, under his relaxed fingers. The moonlight on the snow sifting in the windows gave Sanders all the illumination he needed.

Little by little he wormed out of his bag. The table was between them, and as he crouched behind it he knew that he was hidden, even if Parsons should arouse.

Ten feet distant, at his left hand, the ax lay beside the stove. In five seconds he could get it; in five more he could stand noiselessly above the sleeping figure; a single blow from the flat side would stun him. He would topple sidewise. Sanders would have his automatic covering Pottick before the latter could scramble from his bag. In a flash it would settle the whole thing—

He had turned, half sunk to hands and knees, when the interruption, like a thunderbolt, froze him in his position. Parsons yawned, stirred, sat bolt upright. Then he slipped from his chair.

Pausing by the window, he glanced out to gage the light; then, catlike, stole on, brushing the wall with his finger-tips. At the door of the back room he halted. He found the latch and pressed it softly. The door was locked. Turning, he crept back to the stove, groped on the floor and found the ax. His automatic, to get it out of the way, he thrust into his belt, where the moonlight glinted on it coldly.

Then he jammed the blade of the ax flatwise into the door crack and pried the handle outward. The door creaked, snapped softly and swung inward.

Parsons, on the threshold, peered ahead. His fingers flashed nervously to the gun at his belt; but they never reached it.

At the moment a shadow had flitted across the floor; other fingers knitted about the handle his own sought, and a weight of sheer bone and sinew catapulted onto his shoulders and hurled him headlong.

In the sudden flashing look that he had got of the room, each man at the same instant became aware of an astonishing fact; floors, bunks, and chairs—empty!

Sanders sprang to his feet. In the kitchen Pottick was stamping out of his bag. Parsons, not even stunned, was plunging up. From dead ahead, through an open window, came an icy breeze. Pausing long enough to get the significance of the fact, to hurl his thrashing enemy under a bunk, Sanders dived through the opening.

Out of a three-foot snow-bank he staggered up, sought the long shadows of the cabin and fled headlong. Shouts volleyed after him; orange flashes bored into the dark, and slugs whined past his ears. The dogs, wakened, howled savagely. As Sanders ran, two facts pounded riotously in his mind, Nalunka and Lucille had escaped; and he himself was in the open!

But to offset this good fortune he had lost Parsons's pistol; the thing had jolted from his fingers as he dived through the window.

## CHAPTER XI.

### UNBURIED TREASURE.

BEYOND the brow of the hill a clump of firs threw a dark blotch against the snow. Plunging and breathless, Sanders gained them, halted in the first shadow and looked back.

It was near sunrise; the light was a clear lemon-yellow. A candle-glow flashed across a window of the cabin, showing the men hurrying about inside. Parsons appeared at the near corner, and peered directly at him. A second later the huge figure of Pottick, pistol in hand, joined him.

They paused a moment, then started on a run for the wood. The distance was a scant three hundred yards.

Sanders turned, and like a rabbit, bolted off between the tree-trunks. But the snow was deep and soft; at each step he sank half-way to his knees. The sole consolation was that his pursuers were equally at a disadvantage; and his thousand feet start, if held, ought to prove good.

He was running through thick spruce woods down a steep hill, in the direction, he vaguely recalled, where Nalunka had pointed out the falls. Had she not also said something about a house?

"Over dere Nalunka's house—" he seemed to remember the words.

At any rate, there would be, in the gully, boulders and pricelessly valuable broken ground. He was getting winded, and to bring the stream-bed nearer, veered to the right.

As if from space he heard his name softly called. He pulled up, darting glances in every direction. From a gray boulder at his right, a furred head arose; it was Nalunka, beckoning frantically to him. He ran to her and dropped on his knees behind the rock.

The squaw wasted no words.

"Come!" she ordered, seizing his sleeve. "Mooch."

Turning abruptly to the right she left the woods and started down the flank of a steep knoll. The ground here was in deep shadow; the going rough and the path almost invisible, but the Indian hurried on without slackening her pace. The going became stony, then boulder-strewn, the rocks all blanketed with a soft snow coating, in which they plunged, slipped and struggled.

It was the precipitous bank of a ravine that they were tumbling, crawling, and fighting their way down, and more and more deeply as they penetrated, the light faded and pitch blackness swallowed them.

The old woman whispered:

"Little way ahead dere is bank of falls. Deep, ver' deep! Come!"

Inch by inch she tugged him on. The ground had become so broken that the only way to move in safety was on hands and knees. For several minutes they wormed, inch by inch, down the slope, the red woman in the lead, Sanders clinging often to her hand.

At last Nalunka halted and murmured, "Here bank. Plenty careful, not fall over. I throw stone down, you listen. *Now!*"

Sanders, gripping her hand, swayed forward a trifle, trying to imagine the abyss before him. He put out his other hand; it encountered nothing. They were on the very edge of space; and but for his guide he would have taken the next step forward as confidently as the last!

He felt the tug of her body as she hurled the rock; he counted three full seconds before the faint clatter told of its landing.

"A hundred and fifty feet!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. Mooch beeg fall. Two fall. Half-way down water strike flat place, like beeg shelf, den run off dat, fall 'gen to bottom. Come!"

Nalunka had risen to her feet, and started abruptly toward the right, pulling Sanders after her.

The going became almost immediately smoother, slanting at first to the right, then wheeling abruptly to the left. A certain closeness of the atmosphere told them that they were no longer in the open.

Nalunka paused after a moment, fumbled in her clothing, scratched a match. A candle light shone out.

It spread a thin halo for many feet around, showing rough rock walls overhead and on each side. The path they had descended curved above them, up off into the gloom, and in front down into blue-black depths.

"Dis funny place, heh?" remarked Nalunka. "Dis path, cave in rocks, go down and down 'longside of falls. Easy to go if you have light."

She was striding on again, huge shadows of her legs and head dancing grotesquely on the walls and roof. The going was not too difficult—a steeply descending boulder-strewn way, easily negotiated with a little light. The scrapings of their shoes echoed eerily; the air was close and damp, as in a long-closed cellar.

"Doesn't Pottick know about this path, Nalunka?" inquired Sanders. "I should think he would have—"

"Sure! He know 'bout it! Everybody know 'bout it! But maybe he don't think 'bout it now."

She broke off suddenly. She had come to the end of the covered gallery, had stepped to the right, out on a flat platform of boulder-strewn rock open to the sky. She uttered a word of warning as Sanders came to her side.

"Here shelf place I tell you 'bout. Up dere"—she motioned over her head—"is top of falls. See?"

Stepping back she held the candle high. It shone on the polished, water-worn face of a vast vertical rock towering above them into gloom.

"Over here—" She crossed the six-foot width of the platform, and with her toe dislodged a pebble from the edge. It clattered and rattled noisily down into oblivion. "Over here, rest of falls. Dis half-way."

"Yes," objected Sanders, "but there is no water. Have they gone dry?"

"In winter, yes. Spring, summer, plenty water, come down here where you stand, like sound of gun." She laughed curiously. "Most peoples not come here in winter—too cold, no good, anyway, dey say. So dey not know."

"What?"

"Dis, what I tell you; mans can come out here, stand lak me now, den go back—"

"Back where?"

"Come! Look!"

Again the squaw touched his sleeve, drawing him to the farthest edge of the narrow shelf. There, low down, at the extreme corner, where the projecting ledge rounded up to the vertical face, a dark spot appeared. It was perhaps the size of a narrow-shouldered, crouching man, with irregular, jagged outline.

The Indian dropped to hands and knees in front of it, grunted a word of caution, and then vanished. From the other side Sanders heard her calling him. The dark spot was a cave's mouth.

On the other side the roof vaulted up dizzily, throwing back brilliant scintillations as the rays of the light struck it. The cave appeared to undermine the whole rock which made the breast of the fall and ran on, up and back indefinitely. Sanders judged that it had been formed by the action of carbonated water dissolving the limestone rock, and discharging, during flood times, through the opening into the main body of the stream.

"Dis where we come," explained the squaw as they made their way up the steep ascent. "Den we feex plan for get you out. I go up for look, see what happen when hear gun fired. So I go watch, see if you get clear from dem. Heh? Pottick plenty mad, I guess!"

Sanders looked at her sharply.

"I don't see what you're going to do now," he said. "We can't go out of here again without getting caught. And you can't even show us what you did this for—" He stopped suddenly in his tracks. "I think it's time you *did* tell us, Nalunka. What is all this about? What is going to be the end of it? How are we going to get away from those cutthroats? What do you want of me, and what did you want of Miss Hawkes—by the way, where is she, Nalunka?"

The Indian's face had set again in stern lines.

"She up here," she said briefly. "Have fire—"

They rounded a corner and by the light of a blaze in the corner of two boulders saw the girl coming forward. With a little run she came up to Sanders and seized both his hands. Then she folded them in hers. The gesture was of the briefest, and her eyes, first meeting his, fluttered suddenly to the ground.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she murmured. "I—I was afraid you would never—"

"A little close," acknowledged Sanders, not relinquishing the hands she tugged at, "but not *too* close, so that's all right. I

was worried principally about you. What I'm interested in now, however, is the near future. I think it's up to Nalunka to show us—"

The squaw interrupted him.

"Nalunka has shown," she pronounced solemnly, almost sternly. "Twenty year ago I promise your father I keep his secret. I have keep it. I saw you, knew you his son, knew you hunting for Midas, bring you here. I have keep his secret; now I give it on to you. It is here. My job is finish, John Sanders."

"Here?" repeated Sanders wonderingly. "Here, in this cave? I don't see it."

"Look."

"Is it hidden?"

"No. It is around you. Look!"

Sanders peered about him. Lucille, at his side, slipped her fingers into his and he gripped them tightly. The cave was not wide, perhaps a dozen feet; not more than half as high. Out of it a narrow, curving passage ran up and into the dark. The floor was bare, also the walls; not a vestige of any object of value to be seen.

"What in the world—" marveled Sanders. Lucille Hawkes interrupted him. "Look at Nalunka—what is she—"

The squaw had drawn away from them, backing down the path up which she had led Sanders a few minutes before.

"Here is John Sanders's secret," she repeated. "Look, both two of you. And when you have discovered, climb up the path yonder; it leads through the rocks up into the valley, opposite the cabin. Nalunka goes; she has work to do."

For an instant in sheer amazement, Sanders and the girl were wordless, motionless. Then Lucille cried out, "Nalunka, Nalunka—"

There was no answer. The squaw had gone.

White-cheeked, the man and woman she had left stared at each other.

"What—" began Sanders.

The girl pulled his sleeve. "Come—this way," she cried. "She showed me—it is only a few steps to the ground. We can go faster—"

Half running, stumbling, almost falling, they plunged up the trail, clambered over heaps of house-high boulders, and saw the open sky above them. Turning to the left they followed the bank of the frozen stream round the bend, back toward the falls. They reached the snow-covered boulder slope, stumbled and fought their way over the wilderness of broken, jagged stones, down to the brink. No one was in sight, but dull murmuring soft voices came to their ears. As they paused, peering down into the chasm, a figure appeared far below on the half-way shelf. It had just come out of the gallery. It was Parsons. Behind him came a still larger fur-clad giant. Both advanced a few feet toward the brink and paused.

Sanders pressed the girl's arm.

"The last one was Pottick—" he began. "I wonder—"

"Yes—see, they're looking over—oh!"

It was a shriek of horror, instantly muffled, and not heard below. If it had been, neither Pottick, who stood peering over the edge, nor Nalunka, whose figure now appeared beside him, would have noticed.

It had been a frightful, abrupt, ten seconds' tragedy. Each man, from peering down into the depths, had stealthily turned toward the other, his hand springing from his bosom. There had been an instantaneous struggle on the brink; the flash of two cold shafts of steel; a sudden feint and trip. Pottick had bent, lunged, pushed; then he stood back to laugh. Parsons had disappeared.

The old woman had fallen to cackling contemptuously, pointing at the red knife in the man's hand.

"You still do 'em old tricks, Pottick," she gibed. "You t'ink you believe me for once, goin' get John Sanders's gold, so first t'ing you kill off pardner, so he not have any share."

"Believe you! Yes, I believe you this time. Or else, if you not tell truth, you know what you get, old woman. This last time. This Parsons I don't like anyway. I been goin' kill him for long time. But you see yourself; he had knife on me. He believe goin' get gold, too. It was one or the other. Damn quick. Now come—you say you show me gold; where is it, heh? I been down dis place times enough—"

Sanders put his arm around the girl, who had begun to tremble.

"She—she—" she began to stammer.

"Yes, in summer, when water fall mooch hard," Nalunka was saying. "But in dry time, never."

"Heh?"

Nalunka motioned with her foot at the opening into the cave.

"You never come here before in winter, so you not know beeg hole back in there."

"A cave, heh? Well, is that where—"

"Dat where John Sanders's secret dat I keep for him. But no secret any more, I show his boy jus' now; he goin' back along trail to Black Goose."

"Hell! He's got the gold?"

"Gold?" The squaw broke into laughter, rasping, sardonic, barbed with satanic ridicule. "Gold? I never tell you gold there, Pottick. You guess dat. You think because John Sanders take nothing, go queek, he left gold here. Fool! He send gold before he go by odder mans dat he can trust—leetle at a tam, so no one try to rob him. Dere no gold here—never was gold here, Pottick!" Again her laughter welled out and up, echoing, wailing between the cañon walls like the harsh scream of birds. "But John Sanders have treasure here, all same, dat I give jus' now to his son dere."

"Hell!" screamed Pottick again. His face was furious with maniacal twitchings. He took a step forward; his fingers sought his belt and dropped.

"Twenty years—all that time you lie to me, heh? Why?"

The woman's voice came clearly.

"You remember my brodder, dat you burn, my fadder you have send to jail—my family over dere, dat you break all up, spoil, kill, heh? You remember all dose t'ing you do and not know why? I am Siwash, Pottick. The Siwash does not forget. I keep John Sanders's secret, give it back; den I go for bring you down here—"

Her voice had sunk to a hoarse guttural. She had drawn back flat against the wall, her eyes like eagles. "I bring you down here, Pottick, so we can talk—"

"Talk!" frothed Pottick. "I not talk. I—you know what I'm goin' do, you—"

"I know," she answered levelly. "I know what you and I both goin' do, Pottick—"

Both the voices from below had fallen very low. Lucille Hawkes turned a shuddering face to Sanders.

"John," she breathed, "he's—he's—he means he's goin' to—"

"Yes," said Sanders briefly. He had been dazed. It would take forty seconds, he imagined, to run to the gallery and down the slope. He plunged at full speed into the passage.

Lucille Hawkes, left alone on the edge of the chasm, sank on her knees. She saw Sanders vanish through the opening of the passageway, she heard his feet clattering downward. He was shouting "Keep your hands off, Pottick, or I'll send you to hell—"

At the sound of his voice the big man on the shelf, who for the last few seconds had been rooted motionless, his eyes fixed on the Indian, started galvanically, whirled toward the opening. A blade glittered in his hand. He stood close to the bottom of the passage, squeezed closely against the rock.

Lucille realized what he was waiting for and screamed again. This time Pottick heard her and glanced up. At that instant, it happened; action so quick, so tragic, so unexpected, that for a full ten seconds her mind could not grasp the horror of it. Then, weeping insanely, the girl was on her hands and knees, peering down at the place. It had been like the flicker of the last five feet of film before the empty glare of the white curtain leaves you with an indelible image of the final scene; of the pantherlike leap, the rise and fall of the other knife-blade, the struggle nearer and nearer to the brink.

Sanders had come out and stood there alone, peering about, then up at her. He had seen nothing of it; they had both gone over, locked together like fighting wildcats, before he arrived; the big, yellow-faced man with the blood gushing in a river from between his shoulder-blades, and the lithe little brown-faced Siwash squaw.

Sanders clambered back to Lucille, dazed with horror.

"He was waiting for you," she sobbed. "He had a knife—Nalunka sprang on him—he pulled her over. Come, there *must* be a way—somewhere—"

She tugged him blindly, desperately, down the bank. A hundred feet on they found a way, a steep, rocky, all but impossible path.

"She may be alive," the girl panted. "There is something I want you to hear her say."

Nalunka was alive. They came on her at last, lying, crumpled, in a nest of boulders. Her position showed that she was injured beyond hope. A smile wreathed her face as she saw them, and she reached out her arms.

"Nalunka—" began the girl.

The squaw shook her head.

"She can't speak!" breathed the girl.

Sanders nodded.

"Paralyzed," he murmured. "She can move, though!"

The Indian was still holding out her arms.

Sanders looked at Lucille, but she shook her head.

"She means—you!" she breathed.

"What!"

The girl had him by the arm, leading him closer.

"Sit down 'side of her," she whispered. "She wants—"

Wonderingly, Sanders knelt on the rocks. The old arms folded, circled his shoulders, drew him near. His head was bowed. It rested on her bosom.

He looked up into her face. Flat, aboriginal, seamed with pain, uncultured, it was yet radiant—beautiful with the joy of eternal love, of utmost sacrifice, of longing satisfied, of peace attained.

Lucille Hawkes herself knelt beside them, and her arms were round them both. For an immeasurable time, it seemed to Sanders, whose mind was dazed, nothing was said. He felt like a child, mystified by a course of events beyond his understanding.

Then Lucille rose, pulled him gently to his feet, and led him away. They sat down on a stone, she holding his hand tightly.

He looked at her, suddenly shaken with the mystery of it all.

"What," he murmured, "do you know, Lucille? I'm all at sea—"

"She told me all about it this morning after we got out," she said gently. "She was your mother—the best one you ever had, John, because your real mother, whom your father brought here as a bride, died when you were born, and you never knew each other.

"Your father stayed here two years after that, and Nalunka, then a young woman, was your nurse. She had just lost her own husband and little boy—that was Pottick's doings—and you took the baby's place. Of course she loved you as if you were her own. And when your father took you away—"

"Of course," he murmured. "Of course—I understand."

For quite an interval there was silence. Then Sanders looked up diffidently from the ground and twisted round suddenly to the girl.

"Lucille—" He hesitated. "I've—I've been something of a rotter, I'm afraid; I've been foolish and wasteful and headstrong and a loafer; but I never did a crooked or a lowdown thing—and I do love you, dear. I'm asking you to think if you could ever care enough—and trust enough—to—"

She put her hand over his mouth.

"I don't have to think, John; I know now. But before you ask me, I must tell you about myself—who I am, and how I came ever to be up here—"

"I don't want to know!" he flashed. "I know you're utterly pure and good, Lucille, no matter what—"

"I could never be happy," she insisted. "It isn't long. Listen."

She dropped her hands, bending forward and speaking with tense softness.

"I was born in New England—on a farm in Vermont. When I was a girl I went to church four times a week, washed the dishes every meal, milked, took care of my three younger brothers and sisters, and between times, when there were any betweens, I studied. Oh, yes, and I helped at the housework, too.

"I suppose there are thousands of girls all over the country just like that—tied hand and foot to drudgery, and just living in the hope of running away from it some day, and going on the stage.

"Of course that was what I wanted. As long as my mother lived, I stayed, but when she died and my father married again in three months' time, I ran away to Boston and joined a theatrical stock company.

"After a while we went on the road. I was doing well enough, filling small parts, and might have gone up, but half-way through the trip I came down with typhoid and when they went on, of course I was left behind.

"It was eight weeks before I was fit to work, and I took the first thing that came along—I needed food and clothes. That was a burlesque company. I traveled with it for three months, till the manager made things impossible, then left and joined another. That was the one that blew up in Dawson three months ago. Most of the girls went into the dance-halls. I saw Pottick's advertisement in the paper for waitresses at his hotel. It looked like a better job than I had ever had, so I came up. It was the last boat, and by the time I found out what I was in for, it was too late. So you see—"

Sanders's hand stole over and folded about hers. His eyes were crying out unutterable things, but he made his voice calmly level. That is, he thought he did.

"You needn't have told me this—Lucille," he murmured. "I didn't want to be satisfied—about you, because I knew all I needed to from the moment I saw your eyes. But there's one thing I really would like to have you tell me—if you happen to know—"

"What?"

Sanders smiled awkwardly. "Well, just—just *why* did she tote you up here, Lucille, before she ever imagined we were going to care—"

Lucille Hawkes blushed and turned her head.

"I was furious with her when she told me," she murmured. "You see, the Siwash ideas about picking a wife seem to be rather primitive. She thought that since you were fighting the man who wanted to marry me, you wanted me yourself—and fixed up her kidnaping plot so that whether you won me or not, you might have me. Rather cave-mannish, wasn't it?"

His arms folded about her.

"It was bully!" he averred. "She was a pippin! And she was a thoroughbred, too, wasn't she, Lucille, Siwash and all?" His tone was reverent.

She looked up at him clearly, a mist standing in her eyes.

"Yes—and don't you see, dear, how we have been at sea, both of us, these years? We're nothing—we were nothing till she showed us how—but bits of human drift, broken loose and scudding wild. We're both the same; we've been all wrong. But now—"

There was another silence. Like the two sitting on the rock, the world about them was very still.

Then Sanders asked another question.

"What *was* the treasure, Lucille?—the one she wanted me to see, up there in the cave? Was it—you?"

"Silly," laughed the girl. "Of course not. Much better than that—coal!"

"What!"

"Coal. The whole ridge up there is a vein of it. The walls of the cave were just that—solid walls of anthracite. Didn't you see the light sparkling on it? She told me to have you stake out claims for both of us. When the railroad comes up past here, think what it will mean, John. The vein is tremendously rich. It's ten times better than—buried treasure!"

"And she knew that—all this time—"

"Your father discovered it, and showed it to her. He told her it was valuable, and she promised never to tell any one. There are no outcroppings that reach the surface, so no one has even guessed. That cave and the passage were an old secret of her tribe."

"And now of ours," he smiled.

"Yes," she breathed. Then she raised her face to his, radiant, and he put his arms about her.

**(The end.)**

# A Letter from Lola

by Howard P. Rockey

THE young Viscountess Graydon sat before the mirror of her dressing table, and looked at her lovely reflection with saddened, disillusioned eyes. They were wonderful orbs that flashed fire, yet registered in the glass a sort of plaintive expression. She seemed to seek sympathy from the pleasing image that looked back at her so charmingly.

Turning away from the dainty table, with its furnishings of ivory and gold, she gazed through the silken portières, across Fifth Avenue, into the green of Central Park. She caught the glint of the shimmering lake, now tinged with blood by the setting sun. She was back in her "American Castle," as she laughingly termed her New York home, but her thoughts were in the quaint old French château where she had first met her titled husband.

The ancient pile had been transformed into a base hospital, and the hideous scenes and horrible noises that had re-echoed through its ancient walls, sounded again in the Viscountess's ears as she stared from her boudoir window.

She recalled the not so long ago days when she had been pretty but plain Alys Brainerd. She remembered her trim little uniform, and she pictured herself once more, working like a slavey to minister to the sufferings of wounded Tommies and Poilus, in the days before the Doughboys joined in the fray. And she remembered the night that Lieutenant Bruce Graydon, ninth Viscount of his line, patron of the Alhambra and the Coliseum, and wearer of the Distinguished Service Medal, had come into the great entrance hall.

Alys had been assisting in the transfer of a shell wrecked Poilu from a rude stretcher to a clean comfortable cot. Graydon, immaculate in his swagger uniform and corded breeches, forgot his poise for the moment, and the monocle dropped from his eye. He seriously looked at a woman for the first time in his life.

"How the devil am I going to tell her her father's dead?" he asked himself in perplexity. "She's positively ripping!"

He removed his cap, and brushed back his sleek blond hair. He forgot the polish of his boots and the shimmer of his spurs, as his gloved hands nervously fingered a communication from Downing Street. The young Viscount Lieutenant had been over the top ten times. He wished he was in no man's land at this very moment, and he trembled and shifted awkwardly, as the glorious girl in the Red Cross uniform read the missive he handed to her.

Then she had looked at him. "Dad was a big man," she said simply. "Otherwise Mr. Lloyd George wouldn't have taken the trouble to send you to me with this message."

Young Graydon looked at her in astonished admiration. Of course, Stuart Brai-

nerd had been a big man—one of the American men of affairs upon whom the Allies were pinning their faith, in the hope of bringing America to the rescue. But the spirit of this slip of a girl, who wouldn't give way to the tears that welled from her eyes, was simply amazing.

"Please don't think I'm unfilial, and that the news isn't a blow," she was saying. "But I've gotten so used to death over here, that the word of father's passing away in New York seems to mean no more than the announcement that one of my Poilus or Tommies has gone West during the night. Dad's gone and"—she added with a catch in her throat—"so is that poor boy over there—the one they just brought in!"

But months later, as she sat in her luxurious negligée, in the room she had furnished in the days when she was a little flapper, with never a care in the world, the Viscountess Graydon, née Alys Brainerd, forgot the havoc of Flanders fields, and took thought of the hurt of her own palpitating heart. Stuart Brainerd's death had made her the possessor of twenty-four millions in her own right—a million for every year of her age. But it wasn't her fortune that had changed a slim, immature débutante into a worldly wise young woman. Nor was her transformation entirely due to the fact that she had entered the state of matrimony, or to the unfashionable fact that she was in love with her monocled, nonchalant husband.

She had learned, all too soon, that millions do not necessarily make for married bliss. She had rather admired Bruce's calmness and stoicism under the stress of the dreadful business they had in hand in France. She had enjoyed the calm, quiet, courteous way in which he had paid her court under conditions of war excitement. But just a little later Alys had began to tire of his imperturbability, and to wish that he would display more ardor, and much less—poise. He had the most annoying way of putting his monocle calmly into his eye, and paying her studied compliments, in well phrased, unenthusiastic tones.

It had been well enough, after the war was over, and they journeyed to Bruce's ancestral estate in Scotland. She had still enjoyed his mannerisms when they were married in St. Martin's, and had passed with military-marital splendor, beneath an arch of flashing sabers, held aloft by Graydon's fellow officers. But now, back in her childhood home—her parents dead, and her husband's love apparently waning, Alys was a pathetic, unhappy little creature, despite her title and the millions she possessed.

Evelike, she resorted to her creams, and minutely inspected her beautiful hands, again soft, white and lovely, in striking contrast with their condition in the base hospital days. Then she touched an electric button, and a moment later the summons was answered by her maid, Antoinette, a pretty dark-eyed French girl Alys had brought back home with her.

"Is Lord Graydon at home?" she inquired, and the maid shook her head.

"*Non*, Madame," came the answer. "There is a message from his club, saying that he is detained, and asking Perkins to be on the lookout for a letter—"

The Viscountess raised her eyebrows in pained surprise. "A letter?" she repeated, half puzzled, half disturbed.

"*Oui*," the maid went on. "Oh, Madame, I cannot bear to see you unhappy. I know it is wrong, that it will pain you, but I cannot make my tongue behave! I *must* tell you what I know—"

"Antoinette!" rebuked her mistress. "Do not be foolish. "If you are going to speak of Lord Graydon, I forbid you to do so. I know you are devoted to me, Antoinette, but you do not understand, child."

The maid smiled. She was a year older than Alys, and she had been through hell in the war. Her family were all wiped out, and Alys's determination to bring her to America had won the everlasting affection and loyalty of the girl.

"Madame!" she protested. "It is as you say—that I am wrap' up in you, but *votre marie*—bah!"

Loyally, Alys came to the rescue with a protest that was genuine, even though her heart was filled with misgivings. "You are French," she reminded the girl. "You are naturally demonstrative. Lord Graydon is British and naturally phlegmatic, yet I know he is fond of me."

"Madame, Perkins tells droll stories, which would not suggest as much. Madame should ask him—"

"I shall be very angry with you if you persist in such silliness," Lady Alys said sharply. "I permit you somewhat more freedom than is usual with one's maid, but you must not presume upon that, no matter how well it is meant. I have no intention of prying into my husband's affairs—and I will not allow you to gossip of them to me, or to anyone else!"

But the misgivings in Alys' mind grew. Bruce had been absent a great deal of late. She knew that he was drawing heavily upon his bankers. He was not rich, and she had loved him all the more for his manly refusal to share in her princely income; but his wife also knew that he owed considerable sums of money. Then, too, there had been a veiled, but rather nasty story in *Town Trottings*, hinting of a resumption of one of Bruce's old Alhambra affairs, with a certain dancer now appearing at a New York roof.

Alys had not believed it, despite the fact that she had been told, by a Mrs. Grundy friend, that Bruce had been seen on the Ritz roof with the actress at luncheon.

The maid was crying now. She dropped to her knees, and buried her head in the young Viscountess's lap. "For the world, I would not make you miserable," she said earnestly, and with deep emotion, "but I could *kill* the man who makes you unhappy! You do not know, but my people were of the Apaches of Paris. Faithless love meets only with the stiletto among us!"

"Be still, girl!" exclaimed Alys, horrified. "You do not understand what you are talking about."

Antoinette looked up at her defiantly—indignant. "Will Madame ask Perkins to give her the letter the Milord telephoned Perkins to look out for? It has been delivered. If Madame will read—then Madame will understand."

"No!" said Alys furiously, yet tortured with doubt and overcome with curiosity. She could not believe it possible that Bruce's casual coldness meant anything more than his natural distant manner; but from every side came rumors which perturbed her and made her more miserable in her loneliness and in her longing for the man she worshiped.

Perhaps, she thought, it might be as well to demand to see the letter—since Antoinette laid such stress upon it. Probably its contents would bring a smile to replace her tears—prove it to be deliciously innocent—and clear away, for all time, the doubts which persisted in cropping up to torture her peace of mind. Then cowardice seized her. She was so completely enamored of her husband that she found herself hoping that if she really *had* lost his love—or if she had never possessed it—she might continue to remain in ignorance of his worthlessness.

Then the fighting blood of her deceased father surged within her veins. If Bruce *was* conducting a clandestine correspondence, it seemed only just that she should uncover it. Her winking at his delinquencies was unquestionably folly, and her continuing to secretly doubt him, when the truth lay within her grasp, was unfair to him and to herself.

"Tell Perkins to come here," she said very slowly to Antoinette.

The girl went quickly to the door, a gleam of satisfaction in her flashing eyes. She was gone, and Alys was alone. She gave one timid glance at the mirror and was terrified by the look of horrid doubt that her own eyes flashed back at her fearfully. If this thing was true, she felt that she did not want to know it. If it was not she would be overjoyed, and she prayed that it was not true. She would have preferred to go to Bruce and put her hands upon his shoulders—to look into his frank blue eyes, and ask him whether he no longer loved her. But Bruce was not there, and she felt that she could not endure her torture another moment.

There was a tap at the door, and her nervous response admitted Antoinette and the valet. He appeared rather sheepish. In fact, Alys thought he shot a covert look of resentment in the direction of the maid. But she had no consideration for servants' feelings under the circumstances.

"Perkins," Lady Alys said, "I under-

stand that you have a letter which was delivered this afternoon for Lord Graydon, and that he telephoned to you from his club about it. You should mention such important things to me. Give me the letter. If it is necessary that Lord Graydon should know its contents at once, I will open it and telephone him myself."

Perkins flushed, and seemed uneasy. "I am sorry, Madame, but the letter is for his lordship, and, begging your pardon, Ma'am, he particularly instructed me not to mention it to your ladyship."

Alys grew furious. "Give me the letter—immediately" she demanded.

He looked down at the floor and did not answer. Alys surveyed him with all the keenness of her active little mind. The man's very attitude spelled guilty knowledge.

"I cannot disobey Lord Graydon's instructions" he said at last, evidently wishing himself well out of the situation, and openly flashing his hatred at Antoinette.

"I see that you are trying to be clever as well as deceitful," said Alys with an unpleasant inflection, and a growing dislike for the man. "Give me the letter—unless you feel that it contains something which would shock me."

"I did not presume to open it, Madame," he excused.

"That is not true!" Antoinette broke in. "He has already broken the seal and read it to Lord Graydon over the telephone."

"And are *you* aware of what is in it?" demanded Lady Alys.

"*Oui,* Madame," said the maid with a smile. "And I know it is from Lola Crawford."

"Lola Crawford!" exclaimed Lady Alys, biting her lips. That was the girl of the Alhambra, with whom she had heard that Bruce had lunched at the Ritz. "Give me the letter!" she said peremptorily to the valet.

Sheepishly, the man did so. It was addressed in a bold, rather striking hand, and plainly marked "personal," but the seal was broken, and the flap tucked into the envelope. Lady Alys took on new hope. Since Bruce had instructed his valet to read the missive to him, it could not be of such great importance or confidence. Much as she resented reading her husband's correspondence, uninvited, she felt that her only course was to erase her doubts and to stifle the loyal, but misdirected zeal of her maid, by reading the letter now.

With trembling hands, she drew forth the sheet, and began to decipher the writing. Her pretty hands shook, and her brow clouded as she gathered the meaning of the note.

It read:

DEAR OLD BRUCE:

I safely received the necklace. It is a dream of loveliness, and it is just like you to think of such a gift—but don't you think, old dear, that you're frightfully extravagant? Even if you have a terribly wealthy wife, your generosity has exceeded by far the bounds of the old Alhambra days. I've just slipped the string around my neck. Drop in on me before you turn home for dinner. I'm crazy to have you see the sparkle of the lovely stones. Thanks so much for the books and the flowers. Do ring me up as soon as you get this.

Yours till a red-hot cinder—

LOLA.

Alys dropped the note into her lap and bit her rosy lips until the blood came. Her fingers twitched convulsively and rage, mingled with heartbreak, rendered her speechless. Without waiting to be dismissed, Bruce's valet effaced himself silently, and Antoinette stood there, triumph struggling with her sympathy for her mistress. She had proved her case only too well.

Slowly, Alys folded the letter and slipped it back into its envelope, tossing it upon the dressing table. She sat silently for a few minutes, then a sigh of resignation was followed by a determined flash of her eyes.

"Antoinette," she said with decision. "You must make me very beautiful tonight."

"*Le bon Dieu* did that for Madame," the maid answered, but Alys ignored the sincere flattery.

"Bring my white chiffon velvet gown," Lady Alys directed, picturing the exquisite lines of the thing. And for the next hour she gave herself over to the artistry of her maid. And the picture that resulted was one warranted to charm the most erring of husbands. Finally Lady Alys stood there

critically inspecting herself before the mirror. She had wanted to look charming, but conscious as she naturally was of her beauty of face and figure, she was more than satisfied with the image the pier-glass framed. The soft bodice of her gown was cut low, revealing her lovely shoulders, crossed with diamond clasps. The skirt fell in soft, luxurious folds, and its simple draping cleverly revealed her slim, girlish form. Her only jewel adornment was a rope of perfectly matched pearls that were no more opalescent than her beautiful teeth through parted lips.

"Madame is *magnifique!*" exclaimed Antoinette. And magnificent she was, from the wave of her brown gold hair to the tips of her tiny white satin slippers. Her glorious, creamy skin, her long, silken lashes, and the glitter of dark eyes that peered from behind them, made a ravishing portrait indeed.

But her heart cried out in torment as it suddenly beat faster at the sound of a motor outside. "Go," she said softly to Antoinette, and the maid slipped silently from the room. A door opened and closed. She heard voices, faintly—and then Bruce's laugh, apparently on the stair.

She turned the key in the lock of her door, and waited, breathlessly, until he had passed down the hallway in the direction of his own room. Perkins would have laid out his dinner clothes, and, with his usual rapidity, Alys knew her husband would be dressed within fifteen minutes. She went back to the dressing table and surveyed herself once more. Then, satisfied, she picked up Lola Crawford's letter, and concealing it in the bosom of her gown, where it fairly stabbed her heart, she went softly down to the library.

The shaded lights were turned on, and the quiet beauty of the dignified room made a fitting background for the woman who stepped through the portières, ready for the battle that meant so much to her—the scene that would mean the entrance or the final exit of happiness from her life.

But just across the threshold she paused, and a look of amazement came over her features. On the davenport, half reclined a graceful, sinewy woman, smoking a cigarette. She wore a superb purple creation, with sheer stockings to match, and buckled purple pumps. Even the jewel in her blue black hair had a purple glitter. But its flash of fire in the soft light of the room was no match for the flame that kindled in the eyes of Lady Alys.

"I was not aware that Lord Graydon had invited a dinner guest," she said sarcastically. "Otherwise I should not have been so rude as not to be here to receive you."

The other woman smiled, rather tantalizingly, amusement uppermost in her expression.

"I assume that you are Miss Crawford," Lady Alys continued, drawing the letter from her bodice. "I took the liberty of looking at your note to my husband—"

"Alys!" came Bruce's exclamation, as he darted through the doorway, not having paused to change. It was the nearest approach to emotion Alys had ever known him to display, and even now the familiar monocle reflected the soft glow of the shaded lights and hid the determined expression in his cold blue eye.

Lola Crawford arose and calmly tossed her cigarette into an ash tray. Lady Alys, trembling with excitement, turned to face her husband and extended the letter toward him.

"I see that you not only make presents to other women, and receive letters from them, but you also bring them here to flaunt your affairs in my face! I would not believe the nasty stories that have appeared in print, nor the cruel pointed gossip that has come to my ears from time to time, but it seems that I have been living in a fool's paradise, and deliberately deluding myself—"

"Now just a moment," interrupted Bruce with irritating calm and deliberation. "Perkins just told me about this fool letter. Of course Lola shouldn't have sent it here, but at that—what's the odds?"

Lady Alys's eyes flashed, and she tossed the hateful envelope at her husband's feet. Then tears dimmed the flames that burned behind her lashes, and she sank down miserably in a great leather armchair, burying her face in her ringless hands, bare of jewels

save for the thin gold band upon one slender finger. Even that one seemed to bruise her flesh.

"Oh, I say," blurted Bruce, and a moment later he was kneeling at Alys's side. "Don't take on like this, old girl!" he begged. "Lola isn't a rotter—in fact she's a bally brick! I suppose you thought I meant the necklace for her, but you're really all wrong, you know."

Lady Alys looked up, wonderingly, unable to grasp what he was saying. And in that moment Lola Crawford came quickly toward her.

"You must believe him," she said very earnestly. "It's true Bruce was an old flame of mine, in the days before he knew you. But Bruce is true blue and head over heels in love with you. He asked me to get him the necklace and—"

"And I'm sorry I ever thought of the thing since it's made you all upset, Alys. Lola knew a busted Russian nobleman who needed the cash for the thing, and I asked her to buy it for me. She could strike a better bargain than I could have done. Look at the string. Rather likely stones, eh, what?"

He held the glittering emeralds up before the electrolier. "I wanted to keep the deal a secret and surprise you on your birthday."

Lady Alys broke into a half pathetic little smile of remembrance. "Why today's my birthday," she said. "I'd forgotten, and *you* remembered it!"

"Of course I remembered it, old dear," Lord Graydon said as he gently fastened the necklace about his wife's throat, removing her pearls and laying them on the table. "And since Lola was so ripping as to get this string for me, I asked her to come on and have dinner with us. Then we'll run down to the roof and see her act."

Lady Alys stood up and caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. For a moment she was enthralled by the beauty of Bruce's present, and the striking contrast of the emeralds against the white of her skin and her costume. Then she threw her arms around him, and her heart beat madly as she felt him hold her close.

"Bruce," she said in a chastened tone, "I've been a silly idiot, and if you'd really like to, you may *kiss* Miss Crawford. I think I owe her that much, and it's because I'm very penitent that I'm so very, very generous!"

In the hallway, Antoinette was huddled close to the portières, her tiny ears pressed close to the aperture. An arm slipped about her waist and caught her firmly, eagerly. The voice of the valet whispered, "Now wasn't I telling you the truth, you suspicious little minx? I promised you his Lordship wasn't a bounder, and he wouldn't have me as a valet if I wasn't a man *you* could trust."

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## HUMOR

YOU scoff at that historic wit
Which sent your father in a fit,
And confidently say that what
Was funny then is now "mere rot."
But wait a minute, if you're wise,
You'll note the shifts of Humor's guise,
And will not think his taste is cheap
Who laughs at what sends you to sleep.
You know you, too, may have a son,
Who'll marvel how you find some fun
In pleasantries, where you see none.
Believe me, we all rise and fall,
But Humor wabbles most of all!

*La Touche Hancock.*

# The Efficiency Expert

## Part III

by Edgar Rice Burroughs

Author of the *Tarzan* Tales, "Under the Moons of Mars," "The Mucker," "Pellucidar," etc.

### CHAPTER XV.

#### LITTLE EVA.

EARLY in March Jimmy was again forced to part with his watch. As he was coming out of the pawn-shop late in the afternoon he almost collided with Little Eva.

"For the love of Mike!" cried that young lady, "where have you been all this time, and what's happened to you? You look as though you'd lost your last friend." And then noting the shop from which he had emerged and the deduction being all too obvious, she laid one of her shapely hands upon the sleeve of his cheap, ill-fitting coat. "You're up against it, kid, ain't you?" she asked.

"Oh, it's nothing," said Jimmy ruefully. "I'm getting used to it."

"I guess you're too square," said the girl. "I heard about that Brophy business." And then she laughed softly. "Do you know who the biggest backers of that graft were?"

"No," said Jimmy.

"Well, don't laugh yourself to death," she admonished. "They were Steve Murray and Feinheimer. Talk about sore pups! You never saw anything like it, and when they found who it was that had ditched their wonderful scheme they threw another fit. Say, those birds have been weeping on each other's shoulders ever since."

"Do you still breakfast at Feinheimer's?" asked Jimmy.

"Once in a while," said the girl, "but not so often now." And she dropped her eyes to the ground in what, in another than Little Eva, might have been construed as embarrassment. "Where you going now?" she asked quickly.

"To eat," said Jimmy, and then prompted by the instincts of his earlier training and without appreciable pause: "Won't you take dinner with me?"

"No," said the girl, "but you are going to take dinner with me. You're out of a job and broke, and the chances are you've just this minute hocked your watch, while I have plenty of money. No," she said as Jimmy started to protest, "this is going to be on me. I never knew how much I enjoyed talking with you at breakfast until after you had left Feinheimer's. I've been real lonesome ever since," she admitted

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frankly. "You talk to me different from what the other men do." She pressed his arm gently. "You talk to me, kid, just like a fellow might talk to his sister."

Jimmy didn't know just what rejoinder to make, and so he made none. As a matter of fact, he had not realized that he had said or done anything to win her confidence, nor could he explain his attitude toward her in the light of what he knew of her life and vocation. There is a type of man that respects and reveres womanhood for those inherent virtues which are supposed to be the natural attributes of the sex because in their childhood they have seen them exemplified in their mothers, their sisters and in the majority of women and girls who were parts of the natural environment of their early lives.

It is difficult ever entirely to shatter the faith of such men, and however they may be wronged by individuals of the opposite sex their subjective attitude toward woman in the abstract is one of chivalrous respects. As far as outward appearances were concerned Little Eva might have passed readily as a paragon of all the virtues. As yet, there was no sign nor line of dissipation marked upon her piquant face, nor in her consociation with Jimmy was there ever the slightest reference to or reminder of her vocation.

They chose a quiet and eminently respectable dining place, and after they had ordered, Jimmy spread upon the table an evening paper he had purchased upon the street.

"Help me find a job," he said to the girl, and together the two ran through the want columns.

"Here's a bunch of them," cried the girl laughingly, "all in one ad. Night cook, one hundred and fifty dollars; swing man, one hundred and forty dollars; roast cook, one hundred and twenty dollars; broiler, one hundred and twenty dollars. I'd better apply for that. Fry cook, one hundred and ten dollars. Oh, here's something for Steve Murray: chicken butcher, eighty dollars; here's a job I'd like," she cried, "ice-cream man, one hundred dollars."

"Quit your kidding," said Jimmy. "I'm looking for a job, not an acrostic."

"Well," she said, "here are two solid pages of them, but nobody seems to want a waiter. What else can you do?" she asked, smiling up at him.

"I can drive a milk-wagon," said Jimmy, "but the drivers are all on strike."

"Now, be serious," she announced. "Let's look for something really good. Here's somebody wants a finishing superintendent for a string music instrument factory, and a business manager and electrical engineer in this one. What's an efficiency expert?"

"Oh, he's a fellow who gums up the works, puts you three weeks behind in less than a week and has all your best men resigning inside of a month. I know, because my dad had one at his plant a few years ago."

The girl looked at him for a moment. "Your father is a business man?" she asked, and without waiting for an answer, "Why don't you work for him?"

It was the first reference that Jimmy had ever made to his connections or his past.

"Oh," he said, "he's a long way off and—if I'm no good to any one here I certainly wouldn't be any good to him."

His companion made no comment, but resumed her reading of the advertisement before her:

> WANTED, an Efficiency Expert—Machine works wants man capable of thoroughly reorganizing large business along modern lines, stopping leaks and systematizing every activity. Call International Machine Company, West Superior Street. Ask for Mr. Compton.

"What do you have to know to be an efficiency expert?" asked the girl.

"From what I saw of the bird I just mentioned the less one knows about anything the more successful he should be as an efficiency expert, for he certainly didn't know anything. And yet the results from kicking everybody in the plant out of his own particular rut eventually worked wonders for the organization. If the man had had any sense, tact or diplomacy nothing would have been accomplished."

"Why don't you try it?" asked the girl.

Jimmy looked at her with a quizzical smile. "Thank you," he said.

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way," she

cried. "But from what you tell me I imagine that all a man needs is a front and plenty of punch. You've got the front all right with your looks and gift of gab, and I leave it to Young Brophy if you haven't got the punch."

"Maybe that's not the punch an efficiency expert needs," suggested Jimmy.

"It might be a good thing to have up his sleeve," replied the girl, and then suddenly, "do you believe in hunches?"

"Sometimes," replied Jimmy.

"Well, this is a hunch, take it from me," she continued. "I'll bet you can land that job and make good."

"What makes you think so?" asked Jimmy.

"I don't know," she replied, "but you know what a woman's intuition is."

"I suppose," said Jimmy, "that it's the feminine of hunch. But however good your hunch or intuition may be it would certainly get a terrible jolt if I presented myself to the head of the International Machine Company in this scenery. Do you see anything about my clothes that indicates efficiency?"

"It isn't your clothes that count, Jimmy," she said, "it's the combination of that face of yours and what you've got in your head. You're the most efficient looking person I ever saw, and if you want a reference I'll say this much for you, you're the most efficient waiter that Feinheimer ever had. He said so himself, even after he canned you."

"Your enthusiasm," said Jimmy, "is contagious. If it wasn't for these sorry rags of mine I'd take a chance on that hunch of yours."

The girl laid her hand impulsively upon his.

"Won't you let me help you?" she asked. "I'd like to, and it will only be a loan if you wanted to look at it that way. Enough to get you a decent-looking outfit, such an outfit as you ought to have to land a good job. I know, and everybody else knows, that clothes do count no matter what we say to the contrary. I'll bet you're some looker when you're dolled up! Please," she continued, "won't you please, just try it for a gamble?"

"I don't see how I can," he objected. "The chances are I could never pay you back, and there is no reason in the world why you should loan me money. You are certainly under no obligation to me."

"I wish you would let me, Jimmy," she said. "It would make me awfully happy!"

The man hesitated.

"Oh," she said, "I'm going to do it, anyway. Wait a minute," and, rising, she left the table.

In a few minutes she returned. "Here," she said, "you've got to take it," and extended her hand toward him beneath the edge of the table.

"I can't," said Jimmy. "It wouldn't be right."

The girl looked at him and flushed.

"Do you mean," she said, "because it's my—because of what I am?"

"Oh, no," said Jimmy; "please don't think that!" And impulsively he took her hand beneath the table. At the contact the girl caught her breath with a little quick-drawn sigh.

"Here, take it!" she said, and drawing her hand away quickly, left a roll of bills in Jimmy's hand.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### JIMMY THROWS A BLUFF.

THAT afternoon Mr. Harold Bince had entered his superior's office with an afternoon paper in his hand.

"What's the idea of this ad, Mr. Compton?" he asked. "Why do we need an efficiency expert? I wish you had let me know what you intended doing."

"I knew that if I told you, Harold, you would object," said the older man, "and I thought I would have a talk with several applicants before saying anything about it to any one. Of course, whoever we get will work with you, but I would rather not have it generally known about the plant. There seems to be a leak somewhere and evidently we are too close to the work to see it ourselves. It will require an outsider to discover it."

"I am very much opposed to the idea," said Bince. "These fellows usually do

nothing more than disrupt an organization. We have a force that has been here, many of them, for years. There is as little lost motion in this plant as in any in the country, and if we start in saddling these men with a lot of red-tape which will necessitate their filling out innumerable forms for every job, about half their time will be spent in bookkeeping, which can just as well be done here in the office as it is now. I hope that you will reconsider your intention and let us work out our own solution in a practical manner, which we can do better in the light of our own experience than can an outsider who knows nothing of our peculiar problems."

"We will not permit the organization to be disrupted," replied Mr. Compton. "It may do a lot of good to get a new angle on our problems and at least it will do no harm."

"I can't agree with you," replied Bince. "I think it will do a lot of harm."

Compton looked at his watch. "It is getting late, Harold," he said, "and this is pay-day. I should think Everitt could help you with the pay-roll." Everitt was the cashier.

"I prefer to do it myself," replied Bince. "Everitt has about all he can do, and anyway, I don't like to trust it to any one else." And realizing that Compton did not care to discuss the matter of the efficiency expert further Bince returned to his own office.

The following afternoon the office boy entered Mr. Compton's office. "A gentleman to see you, sir," he announced. "He said to tell you that he came in reply to your advertisement."

"Show him in," instructed Compton, and a moment later Jimmy entered—a rehabilitated Jimmy. Upon his excellent figure the ready-made suit had all the appearance of faultlessly tailored garments. Compton looked up at his visitor, and with the glance he swiftly appraised Jimmy—a glance that assured him that here might be just the man he wanted, for intelligence, aggressiveness and efficiency were evidently the outstanding characteristics of the young man before him. After Jimmy had presented himself the other motioned him to a chair.

"I am looking," said Mr. Compton, "for an experienced man who can come in here and find out just what is wrong with us. We have an old-established business which has been making money for years. We are taking all the work that we can possibly handle at the highest prices we have ever received, and yet our profits are not at all commensurate with the volume of business. It has occurred to me that an experienced man from the outside would be able to more quickly put his finger on the leaks and stop them. Now tell me just what your experience has been and we will see if we can come to some understanding."

From his pocket Jimmy drew a half-dozen envelopes, and taking the contents from them one by one laid them on the desk before Mr. Compton. On the letter-heads of half a dozen large out-of-town manufacturers in various lines were brief but eulogistic comments upon the work done in their plants by Mr. James Torrance, Jr. As he was reading them Mr. Compton glanced up by chance to see that the face of the applicant was slightly flushed, which he thought undoubtedly due to the fact that the other knew he was reading the words of praise contained in the letters, whereas the truth of the matter was that Jimmy's color was heightened by a feeling of guilt.

"These are very good," said Mr. Compton, looking up from the letters. "I don't know that I need go any further. A great deal depends on a man's personality in a position of this sort, and from your appearance I should imagine that you're all right along that line and you seem to have had the right kind of experience. Now, what arrangement can we make?"

Jimmy had given the matter of pay considerable thought, but the trouble was that he did not know what an efficiency expert might be expected to demand. He recalled vaguely that the one his father had employed got something like ten dollars a day, or one hundred a day, Jimmy couldn't remember which, and so he was afraid that he might ask too much and lose the opportunity, or too little and reveal that he had no knowledge of the value of such services.

"I would rather leave that to you," he

said. "What do you think the work would be worth to you?"

"Do you expect to continue in this line of work?" asked Mr. Compton. "When this job is finished you would want to go somewhere else, I suppose?"

Jimmy saw an opening and leaped for it. "Oh, no!" he replied. "On the contrary, I wouldn't mind working into a permanent position, and if you think there might be a possibility of that I would consider a reasonable salary arrangement rather than the usual contract rate for expert service."

"It is very possible," said Mr. Compton, "that if you are the right man there would be a permanent place in the organization for you. With that idea in mind I should say that two hundred and fifty dollars a month might be a mutually fair arrangement to begin with."

Two hundred and fifty dollars a month! Jimmy tried to look bored, but not too bored.

"Of course," he said, "with the idea that it may become a permanent, well-paying position I think I might be inclined to consider it—in fact, I am very favorably inclined toward it," he added hastily as he thought he noted a sudden waning of interest in Compton's expression. "But be sure yourself that I am the man you want. For instance, my methods—you should know something of them first."

In Jimmy's pocket was a small book he had purchased at a second-hand bookshop the evening before, upon the cover of which appeared the title "How to Get More Out of Your Factory." He had not had sufficient time to study it thoroughly, but had succeeded in memorizing several principal headings on the contents page.

"At first," he explained, "I won't seem to be accomplishing much, as I always lay the foundation of my future work by studying my men. Some men have that within them which spurs them on; while some need artificial initiative — outside encouragement," he quoted glibly from "How to Get More Out of Your Factory." "Some men extend themselves under stern discipline; some respond only to a gentle rein. I study men—the men over me, under me, around me. I study them and learn how to get from each the most that is in him. At the same time I shall be looking for leaks and investigating timekeeping methods, wage-paying systems and planning on efficiency producers. Later I shall start reducing costs by studying machines, handling material economically and producing power at lowest cost; keeping the product moving, making environment count on the balance-sheet and protecting against accident and fire." This was as far as Jimmy had memorized, and so he stopped.

"I think," said Mr. Compton, "that you have the right idea. Some of your points are not entirely clear to me, as there are many modern methods that I have not, I am sorry to say, investigated sufficiently."

Jimmy did not think it necessary to explain that they were not clear to him either.

"And now," said Compton, "if you are satisfied with the salary, when can you start?"

Jimmy rose with a brisk and businesslike manner. "I am free now," he said, "with the exception of a little personal business which I can doubtless finish up to-morrow—suppose I come Thursday?"

"Good," exclaimed Compton, "but before you go I want you to meet our assistant general manager, Mr. Bince." And he led Jimmy toward Bince's office.

"This is Mr. Torrance, Harold," said Mr. Compton as they entered, "Mr. Bince, Mr. Torrance. Mr. Torrance is going to help us systematize the plant. He will report directly to me and I know you will do everything in your power to help him. You can go to Mr. Bince for anything in the way of information you require, and Harold, when Mr. Torrance comes Thursday I wish you would introduce him to Everitt and the various department heads and explain that they are to give him full co-operation. And now, as I have an appointment, I shall have to ask you to excuse me. I will see you Thursday. If there are any questions you want to ask, Mr. Bince will be glad to give you any information you wish or care for."

Jimmy had felt from the moment that he was introduced to Bince that the latter was antagonistic and now that the two were

alone together he was not long left in doubt as to the correctness of his surmise. As soon as the door had closed behind Mr. Compton Bince wheeled toward Jimmy.

"I don't mind telling you, Mr. Torrance," he said, "that I consider the services of an expert absolutely unnecessary, but if Mr. Compton wishes to experiment I will interfere in no way and I shall help you all I can, but I sincerely hope that you, on your part, will refrain from interfering with my activities. As a matter of fact, you won't have to leave this office to get all the information you need, and if you will come to me I can make it easy for you to investigate the entire workings of the plant and save you a great deal of unnecessary personal labor. I suppose that you have had a great deal of experience along this line?"

Jimmy nodded affirmatively.

"Just how do you purpose proceeding?"

"Oh, well," said Jimmy, "each one of us really has a system of his own. At first I won't seem to be accomplishing much, as I always lay the foundation of my future work by studying my men. Some men have that within them which spurs them on; while some need artificial initiative—outside encouragement." He hoped that the door to Compton's office was securely closed.

"Some men extend themselves under stern discipline; some respond only to a gentle rein. I study men—the men over me, under me, around me. I study them and learn how to get from each the most that is in him. At the same time I shall be looking for leaks and investigating time-keeping methods"—he was looking straight at Bince and he could not help but note the slight narrowing of the other's lids—"wage-paying systems and planning on efficiency producers."

Here he hesitated a moment as though weighing his words, though as a matter of fact he had merely forgotten the title of the next chapter, but presently he went on again:

"Later I shall start reducing costs by studying machines, handling material economically and producing power at lowest costs; keeping the product moving, making environment count on the balance-sheet and protecting against accident and fire."

"Is that all?" asked Mr. Bince.

"Oh, no, indeed!" said Jimmy. "That's just a very brief outline of the way I shall start."

"Ah!" said Mr. Bince. "And just now, may I ask, do you make environment count on the balance-sheet? I do not quite understand."

Jimmy was mentally gasping and going down for the third time. He had wondered when he read that chapter title just what it might mean.

"Oh," he said, "you will understand that thoroughly when we reach that point. It is one of the steps in my method. Other things lead up to it. It is really rather difficult to explain until we have a concrete example, something that you can really visualize, you know. But I assure you that it will be perfectly plain to you when we arrive at that point.

"And now," he said, rising, "I must be going. I have a great deal to attend to this afternoon and to-morrow, as I wish to get some personal matters out of the way before I start in here Thursday."

"All right," said Mr. Bince, "I suppose we shall see you Thursday, but just bear in mind, please, that you and I can work better together than at cross-purposes."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### JIMMY ON THE JOB.

AS Jimmy left the office he discovered that those last words of Bince's had made a considerable and a rather unfavorable impression on him. He was sure that there was an underlying meaning, though just what it portended he was unable to imagine.

From the International Machine Company Jimmy went directly to the restaurant where he and Little Eva had dined the night before. He found her waiting for him, as they had agreed she would.

"Well, what luck?" she asked as he took the chair next to her.

"Oh, I landed the job all right," said Jimmy, "but I feel like a crook. I don't

know how in the world I ever came to stand for those letters of recommendation. They were the things that got me the job all right, but I honestly feel just as though I had stolen something."

"Don't feel that way," said the girl. "You'll make good, I know, and then it won't make any difference about the letters."

"And now," said Jimmy, "tell me where you got them. You promised me that you would tell me afterward."

"Oh," said the girl, "that was easy. A girl who rooms at the same place I do works in a big printing and engraving plant and I got her to get me some samples of letterheads early this morning. In fact, I went down-town with her when she went to work, and then I went over to the Underwood offices and wrote the recommendations out on a machine—I used to be a stenographer."

"And you forged these names?" asked Jimmy, horrified.

"I didn't forge anybody's name," replied the girl. "I made them up."

"You mean there are no such men?"

"As far as I know there are not," she replied, laughing.

Slowly Jimmy drew the letters from his inside pocket and read them one by one, spreading them out upon the table before him. Presently he looked up at the girl.

"Why don't you get a position again as a stenographer?" he asked.

"I have been thinking of it," she said; "do you want me to?"

"Yes," he said, "I want you to very much."

"It will be easy," she said. "There is no reason why I shouldn't except that there was no one ever cared what I did."

As she finished speaking they were both aware that a man had approached their table and stopped opposite them. Jimmy and the girl looked up to see a large man in a dark suit looking down at Eva. Jimmy did not recognize the man, but he knew at once what he was.

"Well, O'Donnell, what's doing?" asked the girl.

"You know what's doing," said the officer. "How miny toimes do the capt'in have to be afther isshuin' orrders tellin' you janes to kape out uv dacent places?"

The girl flushed. "I'm not working here," she said.

"Tu hell ye ain't," sneered O'Donnell. "Didn't I see ye flag this guy whin he came in?"

"This young lady is a friend of mine," said Jimmy. "I had an appointment to meet her here."

O'Donnell shifted his gaze from the girl to her escort and for the first time appraised Jimmy thoroughly. "Oh, it's you, is it?" he asked.

"It is," said Jimmy; "you guessed it the first time, but far be it from me to know what you have guessed, as I never saw you before, my friend."

"Well, I've seen you before," said O'Donnell, "and ye put one over on me that time all roight, I can see now. I don't know what your game was, but you and the Lizard played it pretty slick when you could pull the wool over Patrick O'Donnell's eyes the way ye done."

"Oh," said Jimmy, "I've got you now. You're the bull who interfered with my friend and me on Randolph and La Salle 'way back last July."

"I am," said O'Donnell, "and I thought ye was a foine young gentleman, and you are a foine one," he said with intense sarcasm.

"Go away and leave us alone," said the girl. "We're not doing anything. We ate in here last night together. This man is perfectly respectable. He isn't what you think him, at all."

"I'm not going to pinch him," said O'Donnell; "I ain't got nothin' to pinch him for, but the next time I see him I'll know him."

"Well," said the girl, "are you going to beat it or are you going to stick around here bothering us all evening? There hasn't anybody registered a complaint against me in here."

"Naw," said O'Donnell, "they ain't, but you want to watch your step or they will."

"All right," said the girl, "run along and sell your papers." And she turned again to Jimmy, and as though utterly unconscious of the presence of the police of-

ficer, she remarked, "That big stiff gives me a pain. He's the original Buttinsky Kid."

O'Donnell flushed. "Watch your step, young lady," he said as he turned and walked away.

"I thought," said Jimmy, "that it was the customary practise to attempt to mollify the guardians of the law."

"Mollify nothing," returned the girl. "None of these big bruisers knows what decency is, and if you're decent to them they think you're afraid of them. When they got something on you you got to be nice, but when they haven't, tell them where they get off. I knew he wouldn't pinch me; he's got nothing to pinch me for, and he'd have been out of luck if he had, for there hasn't one of them got anything on me."

"But won't he have it in for you?" asked Jimmy.

"Sure, he will," said the girl. "He's got it in for everybody. That's what being a policeman does to a man. Say, most of these guys hate themselves. I tell you, though," she said presently and more seriously, "I'm sorry on your account. These dicks never forget a face. He's got you catalogued and filed away in what he calls his brain alongside of a dip and—a"—she hesitated—"a girl like me, and no matter how high up you ever get if your foot slips up will bob O'Donnell with these two facts."

"I'm not worrying," said Jimmy. "I don't intend to let my foot slip in his direction."

"I hope not," said the girl.

Thursday morning Jimmy took up his duties as efficiency expert at the plant of the International Machine Company. Since his interview with Compton his constant companion had been "How to Get More Out of Your Factory," with the result that he felt that unless he happened to be pitted against another efficiency expert he could at least make a noise like efficiency, and also he had grasped what he considered the fundamental principle of efficiency, namely, simplicity.

"If," he reasoned, "I cannot find in any plant hundreds of operations that are not being done in the simplest manner it will be because I haven't even ordinary powers of observation or intelligence," for after his second interview with Compton, Jimmy had suddenly realized that the job meant something to him beside the two hundred and fifty dollars a month—that he couldn't deliberately rob Compton, as he felt that he would be doing unless he could give value received in services, and he meant to do his best to accomplish that end.

He knew that for a while his greatest asset would be bluff, but there was something about Mason Compton that had inspired in the young man a vast respect and another sentiment that he realized upon better acquaintance might ripen into affection. Compton reminded him in many ways of his father, and with the realization of that resemblance Jimmy felt more and more ashamed of the part he was playing, but now that he had gone into it he made up his mind that he would stick to it, and there was besides the slight encouragement that he had derived from the enthusiasm of the girl who had suggested the idea to him and of her oft-repeated assertion relative to her "hunch" that he would make good.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE EFFICIENCY EXPERT.

UNLIKE most other plants the International Machine Company paid on Monday, and it was on the Monday following his assumption of his new duties that Jimmy had his first clash with Bince. He had been talking with Everitt, the cashier, whom, in accordance with his "method," he was studying. From Everitt he had learned that it was pay [illegible] and he had asked the cashier to let him see the pay-roll.

"I don't handle the pay-roll," replied Everitt a trifle peevishly. "Shortly after Mr. Bince was made assistant general manager a new rule was promulgated, to the effect that all salaries and wages were to be considered as confidential and that no one but the assistant general manager would handle the pay-rolls. All I know is the

amount of the weekly check. He hires and fires everybody and pays everybody."

"Rather unusual, isn't it?" commented Jimmy.

"Very," said Everitt. "Here's some of us have been with Mr. Compton since Bince was in long clothes, and then he comes in here and says that we are not to be trusted with the pay-roll."

"Well," said Jimmy, "I shall have to go to him to see it then."

"He won't show it to you," said Everitt.

"Oh, I guess he will," said Jimmy, and a moment later he knocked at Bince's office door. When Bince saw who it was he turned back to his work with a grunt.

"I am sorry, Torrance," he said, "but I can't talk with you just now. I'm very busy."

"Working on the pay-roll?" said Jimmy.

"Yes," snarled Bince.

"That's what I came in to see," said the efficiency expert.

"Impossible," said Bince. "The International Machine Company's pay-roll is confidential, absolutely confidential. Nobody sees it but me or Mr. Compton if he wishes to."

"I understood from Mr. Compton," said Jimmy, "that I was to have full access to all records."

"That merely applied to operation records," said Bince. "It had nothing to do with the pay-roll."

"I should consider the pay-roll very closely allied to operations," responded Jimmy.

"I shouldn't," said Bince.

"You won't let me see it then?" demanded Jimmy.

"Look here," said Bince, "we agreed that we wouldn't interfere with each other. I haven't interfered with you. Now don't you interfere with me. This is my work, and my office is not being investigated by any efficiency expert or any one else."

"I don't recall that I made any such agreement," said Jimmy. "I must insist on seeing that pay-roll."

Bince turned white with suppressed anger, and then suddenly slamming his pen on the desk, he wheeled around toward the other.

"I might as well tell you something," he said, "that will make your path easier here, if you know it. I understand that you want a permanent job with us. If you do you might as well understand now as any other time that you have got to be satisfactory to me. Of course, it is none of your business, but it may help you to understand conditions when I tell you that I am to marry Mr. Compton's daughter, and when I do that he expects to retire from business, leaving me in full charge here. Now, do you get me?"

Jimmy had involuntarily acquired antipathy toward Bince at their first meeting, an antipathy which had been growing the more that he saw of the assistant general manager. This fact, coupled with Bince's present rather nasty manner, was rapidly arousing the anger of the efficiency expert.

"I didn't come in here," he said, "to discuss your matrimonial prospects, Mr. Bince. I came in here to see the pay-roll, and you will oblige me by letting me see it."

"I tell you again," said Bince, "once and for all, that you don't see the pay-roll nor anything else connected with my office, and you will oblige me by not bothering me any longer. As I told you when you first came in, I am very busy."

Jimmy turned and left the room. He was on the point of going to Compton's office and asking for authority to see the pay-roll, and then it occurred to him that Compton would probably not take sides against his assistant general manager and future son-in-law.

"I've got to get at it some other way," said Jimmy, "but you bet your life I'm going to get at it. It looks to me as though there's something funny about that pay-roll."

On his way out he stopped at Everitt's cage. "What was the amount of the check for the pay-roll for this week, Everitt?" he asked.

"A little over ninety-six hlundred dollars."

"Thanks," said Jimmy, and returned to the shops to continue his study of his men, and as he studied them he asked many questions, made many notes in his little note-book, and always there were two ques-

tions that were the same: "What is your name? What wages do you get?"

"I guess," said Jimmy, "that in a short time I will know as much about the pay-roll as the assistant general manager."

Nor was it the pay-roll only that claimed Jimmy's attention. He found that several handlings of materials could be eliminated by the adoption of simple changes, and that a rearrangement of some of the machines removed the necessity for long hauls from one part of the shop to another. After an evening with the little volume he had purchased for twenty-five cents in the second-hand bookshop he ordered changes that enabled him to cut five men from the pay-roll and at the same time do the work more expeditiously and efficiently.

"Little book," he said one evening, "I take my hat off to you. You are the best two-bits' worth I ever purchased."

The day following the completion of the changes he had made in the shop he was in Compton's office.

"Patton was explaining some of the changes you have made," remarked Compton. Patton was the shop foreman. "He said they were so simple that he wondered none of us had thought of them before. I quite agree with him."

"So do I," returned Jimmy, "but, then, my whole method is based upon simplicity." And his mind traveled to the unpretentious little book on the table in his room on Indiana Avenue.

"The feature that appeals to me most strongly is that you have been able to get the cooperation of the men," continued Compton; "that's what I feared—that they wouldn't accept your suggestions. How did you do it?"

"I showed them how they could turn out more work and make more money by my plan. This appealed to the piece-workers. I demonstrated to the others that the right way is the easiest way—I showed them how they could earn their wages with less effort."

"Good," said Compton. "You are running into no difficulties then? Is there any way in which I can help you?"

"I am getting the best kind of cooperation from the men in the shop, practically without exception," replied Jimmy, "although there is one fellow, a straw boss named Krovac, who does not seem to take as kindly to the changes I have made as the others, but he really doesn't amount to anything as an obstacle." Jimmy also thought of Bince and the pay-roll, but he was still afraid to broach the subject. Suddenly an inspiration came to him.

"Yes," he said, "I believe your accounting system could be improved—it will take me months to get around to it, as my work is primarily in the shop, at first, at least. You can save both time and money by having your books audited by a firm of public accountants who can also suggest a new and more up-to-date system."

"Not a bad idea," said Compton. "I think we will do it."

For another half-hour they discussed Jimmy's work, and then as the latter was leaving Compton stopped him.

"By the way, you don't happen to know of a good stenographer, do you? Miss Withe is leaving me Saturday."

Jimmy thought a moment. Instantly he thought of Little Eva and what she had said of her experience as a stenographer, and her desire to abandon her present life for something in the line of her former work. Here was a chance to repay her in some measure for her kindness to him.

"Yes," he said, "I do know of a young lady who, I believe, could do the work. Shall I have her call on you?"

"If you will, please," replied Compton.

As Jimmy left the office Compton rang for Bince, and when the latter came, told him of his plan to employ a firm of accountants to renovate their entire system of bookkeeping.

"Is that one of Torrance's suggestions?" asked Bince.

"Yes, the idea is his," replied Compton, "and I think it is a good one."

"It seems to me," said Bince, "that Torrance is balling things up sufficiently as it is without getting in other theorizers who have no practical knowledge of our business. The result of all this will be to greatly increase our overhead by saddling us with a lot of red-tape in the accounting department similar to that which Torrance is loading the producing end with."

"I am afraid that you are prejudiced, Harold," said Compton. "I cannot discover that Torrance is doing anything to in any way complicate the shop work. As a matter of fact, a single change which he has just made has resulted in our performing certain operations in less time and to better advantage with five less men than formerly. Just in this one thing he has not only more than earned his salary, but is really paying dividends on our investment."

Bince was silent for a moment. He had walked to the window and was looking out on the street below, then he turned suddenly toward Compton.

"Mr. Compton," he said, "you have made me assistant general manager here and now, just when I am reaching a point where I feel I can accomplish something, you are practically taking the authority out of my hands and putting it in that of a stranger. I feel not only that you are making a grave mistake, but that it is casting a reflection on my work. It is making a difference in the attitude of the men toward me that I am afraid can never be overcome, and consequently while lessening my authority it is also lessening my value to the plant. I am going to ask you to drop this whole idea. As asistant general manager, I feel that it is working injury to the organization, and I hope that before it is too late—that, in fact, immediately, you will discharge Torrance and drop this idea of getting outsiders to come in and install a new accounting system."

"You're altogether too sensitive, Harold," replied Compton. "It is no reflection on you whatsoever. The system under which we have been working is, with very few exceptions, the very system that I evolved myself through years of experience in this business. If there is any reflection upon any one it is upon me and not you. You must learn to realize, if you do not already, what I realize—that no one is infallible. Just because the system is mine or yours we must not think that no better system can be devised. I am perfectly satisfied with what Mr. Torrance is doing, and I agree with his suggestion that we employ a firm of accountants, but I think no less of you or your ability on that account."

Bince saw that it was futile to argue the matter further.

"Very well, sir," he said. "I hope that I am mistaken and that no serious harm will result. When do you expect to start these accountants in?"

"Immediately," replied Compton. "I shall get in touch with somebody to-day."

Bince shook his head dubiously as he returned to his own office.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### PLOTTING.

THE following Monday Miss Edith Hudson went to work for the International Machine Company as Mr. Compton's stenographer. Nor could the most fastidious have discovered aught to criticise in the appearance or deportment of "Little Eva."

The same day the certified public accountants came. Mr. Harold Bince appeared nervous and irritable, and he would have been more nervous and more irritable had he known that Jimmy had just learned the amount of the pay-check from Everitt and that he had discovered that, although five men had been laid off and no new ones employed since the previous week, the pay-roll check was practically the same as before—approximately one thousand dollars more than his note-book indicated it should be.

"Phew!" whistled Jimmy. "These C. P. A.'s are going to find this a more interesting job than they anticipated. Poor old Compton! I feel mighty sorry for him, but he had better find it out now than after that grafter has wrecked his business entirely."

That afternoon Mr. Compton left the office earlier than usual, complaining of a headache, and the next morning his daughter telephoned that he was ill and would not come to the office that day. During the morning as Bince was walking through the shop he stopped to talk with Krovac.

Pete Krovac was a rat-faced little foreigner, looked upon among the men as a trouble-maker. He nursed a perpetual grievance against his employer and his job,

and whenever the opportunity presented, and sometimes when it did not present itself, he endeavored to inoculate others with his dissatisfaction. Bince had hired the man, and during the several months that Krovac had been with the company, the assistant general manager had learned enough from other workers to realize that the man was an agitator and a trouble-maker. Several times he had been upon the point of discharging him, but now he was glad that he had not, for he thought he saw in him a type that in the light of present conditions might be of use to him.

In fact, for the past couple of weeks he had been using the man in an endeavor to get some information concerning Torrance and his methods that would permit him to go to Compton with a valid argument for Jimmy's discharge.

"Well, Krovac," he said as he came upon the man, "is Torrance interferring with you any now?"

"He hasn't got my job yet," growled the other, "but he's letting out hard-working men with families without any reason. The first thing you know you'll have a strike on your hands."

"I haven't heard any one else complaining," said Bince.

"You will, though," replied Krovac. "They don't any of us know when we are going to be canned to give Compton more profit, and men are not going to stand for that long."

"Then," said Bince, "I take it that he really hasn't interfered with you much?"

"Oh, he's always around asking a lot of fool questions," said Krovac. "Last week he asked every man in the place what his name was and what wages he was getting. Wrote it all down in a little book. I suppose he is planning on cutting pay."

Bince's eyes narrowed. "He got that information from every man in the shop?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Krovac.

Bince was very pale. He stood in silence for some minutes, apparently studying the man before him. At last he spoke.

"Krovac," he said, "you don't like this man Torrance, do you?"

"No," said the other, "I don't."

"Neither do I," said Bince. "I know his plans even beter than you. This shop has short hours and good pay, but if we don't get rid of him it will have the longest hours and lowest pay of any shop in the city."

"Well?" questioned Krovac.

"I think," said Bince, "that there ought to be some way to prevent this man doing any further harm here."

He looked straight into Krovac's eyes.

"There is," muttered the latter.

"It would be worth something of course," sugested Bince.

"How much?" asked Krovac.

"Oh, I should think it ought to be worth a hundred dollars," replied Bince.

Krovac thought for a moment.

"I think I can arrange it," he said, "but I would have to have fifty now."

"I cannot give it to you here," said Bince, "but if I should happen to pass through the shop this afternoon you might find an envelope on the floor beside your machine after I have gone."

The following evening as Jimmy alighted from the Indiana Avenue car at Eighteenth Street, two men left the car behind him. He did not notice them, although, as he made his way toward his boarding-house, he heard footsteps directly in his rear, and suddenly noting that they were approaching him rapidly, he involuntarily cast a glance behind him just as one of the men raised an arm to strike at him with what appeared to be a short piece of pipe.

Jimmy dodged the blow and then both men sprang for him. The first one Jimmy caught on the point of the chin with a blow that put its recipient out of the fight before he got into it, and then his companion, who was the larger, succeeded in closing with the efficiency expert. Inadvertently, however, he caught Jimmy about the neck, leaving both his intended victim's arms free with the result that the latter was able to seize his antagonist low down about the body, and then pressing him close to him and hurling himself suddenly forward, he threw the fellow backward upon the cement sidewalk with his own body on top. With a resounding whack the attacker's head came in contact with the concrete, his arms

relaxed their hold upon Jimmy's neck, and as the latter arose he saw both his assailants, temporarily at least, out of the fighting.

Jimmy glanced hastily in both directions. There was no one in sight. His boarding-house was but a few steps away, and two minutes later he was safe in his room.

"A year ago," he thought to himself, smiling, "my first thought would have been to have called in the police, but the Lizard has evidently given me a new view-point in regard to them," for the latter had impressed upon Jimmy the fact that whatever knowledge a policeman might have regarding one was always acquired with the idea that eventually it might be used against the person to whom it pertained.

"What a policeman don't know about you will never hurt you," was one way that the Lizard put it.

When Jimmy appeared in the shop the next morning he noted casually that Krovac had a cut upon his chin, but he did not give the matter a second thought. Bince had arrived late. His first question, as he entered the small outer office where Mr. Compton's stenographer and his worked, was addressed to Miss Edith Hudson.

"Is Mr. Torrance down yet?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the girl, "he has been here some time. Do you wish to see him?"

Edith thought that the "No" which he snapped at her was a trifle more emphatic than the circumstances seemed to warrant, nor could she help but notice after he had entered his office the vehement manner in which he slammed the door.

"I wonder what's eating him," thought Miss Hudson to herself. "Of course he doesn't like Jimmy, but why is he so peeved because Jimmy came to work this morning —I don't quite get it."

Almost immediately Bince sent for Krovac, and when the latter came and stood before his desk the assistant general manager looked up at him questioningly.

"Well?" he asked.

"Look at my chin," was Krovac's reply, "and he damn near killed the other guy."

"Maybe you'll have better luck the next time," growled Bince.

"There ain't goin' to be no next time," asserted Krovac. "I don't tackle that guy again."

Bince held out his hand.

"All right," he said, "you might return the fifty then."

"Return nothin'," growled Krovac. "I sure done fifty dollars' worth last night."

"Come on," said Bince, "hand over the fifty."

"Nothin' doin'," said Krovac with an angry snarl. "It might be worth another fifty to you to know that I wasn't going to tell old man Compton."

"You damn scoundrel!" exclaimed Bince.

"Don't go callin' me names," admonished Krovac. "A fellow that hires another to croak a man for him for one hundred bucks ain't got no license to call nobody names."

Bince realized only too well that he was absolutely in the power of the fellow and immediately his manner changed.

"Come," he said, "Krovac, there is no use in our quarreling. You can help me and I can help you. There must be some other way to get around this."

"What are you trying to do?" asked Krovac. "I got enough on you now to send you up, and I don't mind tellin' yuh," he added, "that I had a guy hid down there in the shop where he could watch you drop the envelope behind my machine. I got a witness, yuh understand!"

Mr. Bince did understand, but still he managed to control his temper.

"What of it?" he said. "Nobody would believe your story, but let's forget that. What we want to do is get rid of Torrance."

"That isn't all you want to do," said Krovac. "There is something else."

Bince realized that he was compromised as hopelessly already as he could be if the man had even more information.

"Yes," he said, "there is something beside Torrance's interference in the shop. He's interfering with our accounting system and I don't want it interfered with just now."

"You mean the pay-roll?" asked Krovac.

"It might be," said Bince.

"You want them two new guys that are

working in the office croaked, too?" asked Krovac.

"I don't want anybody 'croaked,'" replied Bince. "I didn't tell you to kill Torrance in the first place. I just said I didn't want him to come back here to work."

"Ah, hell, what you givin' us?" growled the other. "I knew what you meant and you knew what you meant, too. Come across straight. What do you want?"

"I want all the records of the certified public accountants who are working here," said Bince after a moment's pause. "I want them destroyed, together with the pay-roll records."

"Where are they?"

"They will all be in the safe in Mr. Compton's office."

Krovac knitted his brows in thought for several moments. "Say," he said, "we can do the whole thing with one job."

"What do you mean?" asked Bince.

"We can get rid of this Torrance guy and get the records, too."

"How?" asked Bince.

"Do you know where Feinheimer's is?"

"Yes."

"Well, you be over there to-night about ten thirty and I'll introduce you to a guy who can pull off this whole thing, and you and I won't have to be mixed up in it at all."

"To-night at ten thirty," said Bince.

"At Feinheimer's," said Krovac.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### AN INVITATION TO DINE.

As the workman passed through the little outer office Edith Hudson glanced up at him.

"Where," she thought after he had gone, "have I seen that fellow before?"

Jimmy was in the shop applying "How to Get More Out of Your Factory" to the problems of the International Machine Company when he was called to the telephone.

"Is this Mr. Torrance?" asked a feminine voice.

"It is," replied Jimmy.

"I am Miss Compton. My father will probably not be able to get to the office for several days, and as he wishes very much to talk with you he has asked me to suggest that you take dinner with us this evening."

"Thank you," said Jimmy. "Tell Mr. Compton that I will come to the house right after the shop closes to-night."

"I suppose," said Elizabeth Compton as she turned away from the phone, "that an efficiency expert is a very superior party and that his conversation will be far above my head."

Compton laughed. "Torrance seems to be a very likable chap," he said, "and as far as his work is concerned he is doing splendidly."

"Harold doesn't think so," said Elizabeth. "He is terribly put out about the fellow. He told me only the other night that he really believed that it would take years to overcome the bad effect that this man has had upon the organization and upon the work in general."

"That is all poppycock," exclaimed Compton, rather more irritably than was usual with him. "For some reason Harold has taken an unwarranted dislike to this man, but I am watching him closely, and I will see that no very serious mistakes are made."

When Jimmy arrived at the Compton home he was ushered into the library where Mr. Compton was sitting. In a corner of the room, with her back toward the door, Elizabeth Compton sat reading. She did not lay aside her book or look in his direction as Jimmy entered, for the man was in no sense a guest in the light of her understanding of the term. He was merely one of her father's employees here on business to see him, doubtless a very ordinary sort of person whom she would, of course, have to meet when dinner was announced, but not one for whom it was necessary to put oneself out in any way.

Mr. Compton rose and greeted Jimmy cordially and then turned toward his daughter.

"Elizabeth," he said, "this is Mr. Torrance, the efficiency expert at the plant."

Leisurely Miss Compton laid aside her book. Rising, she faced the newcomer, and as their eyes met, Jimmy barely stifled a

gasp of astonishment and dismay. Elizabeth Compton's arched brows raised slightly and involuntarily she breathed a low ejaculation, "Efficiency expert!"

Simultaneously there flashed through the minds of both in rapid succession a series of recollections of their previous meetings. The girl saw the clerk at the stocking-counter, the waiter at Feinheimer's, the prize-fighter at the training quarters and the milk-wagon driver. All these things passed through her mind in the brief instant of the introduction and her acknowledgment of it. She was too well-bred to permit any outward indication of her recognition of the man other than the first almost inaudible ejaculation that had been surprised from her.

The indifference she had felt prior to meeting the efficiency expert was altered now to a feeling of keen interest as she realized that she held the power to relieve Bince of the further embarrassment of the man's activities in the plant, and also to save her father from the annoyance and losses that Bince had assured her would result from Torrance's methods. And so she greeted Jimmy Torrance pleasantly, almost cordially.

"I am delighted," she said, "but I am afraid that I am a little awed, too, as I was just saying to father before you came that I felt an efficiency expert must be a very superior sort of person."

If she placed special emphasis on the word "superior" it was so cleverly done that it escaped the notice of her father.

"Oh, not at all," replied Jimmy. "We efficiency experts are really quite ordinary people. One is apt to meet us in any place that nice people are supposed to go."

Elizabeth felt the color rising slowly to her cheek. She realized then that if she had thrown down the gage of battle the young man had lost no time in taking it up.

"I am afraid," she said, "that I do not understand very much about the nature or the purpose of your work, but I presume the idea is to make the concern with which you are connected more prosperous—more successful?"

"Yes," said her father, "that is the idea, and even in the short time he has been with us Mr. Torrance has effected some very excellent changes."

"It must be very interesting work," commented the girl; "a profession that requires years of particular experience and study, and I suppose one must be really thoroughly efficient and successful himself, too, before he can help to improve upon the methods of others or to bring them greater prosperity."

"Quite true," said Jimmy. "Whatever a man undertakes he should succeed in before he can hope to bring success to others."

"Even in trifling occupations, I presume," suggested the girl, "efficiency methods are best—an efficiency expert could doubtlessly drive a milk-wagon better than an ordinary person?" And she looked straight into Jimmy's eyes, an unquestioned challenge in her own.

"Unquestionably," said Jimmy. "He could wait on table better, too."

"Or sell stockings?" suggested Elizabeth.

It was at this moment that Mr. Compton was called to the telephone in an adjoining room, and when he had gone the girl turned suddenly upon Jimmy Torrance. There was no cordiality nor friendship in her expression; a sneer upcurved her short upper lip.

"I do not wish to humiliate you unnecessarily in the presence of my father," she said. "You have managed to deceive him into believing that you are what you claim to be. Mr. Bince has known from the start that you are incompetent and incapable of accomplishing the results father thinks you are accomplishing. Now that you know that I know you to be an impostor, what do you intend to do?"

"I intend to keep right on with my work in the plant, Miss Compton," replied Jimmy.

"How long do you suppose father would keep you after I told him what I know of you? Do you think that he would for a moment place the future of his business in the hands of an ex-waiter from Feinheimer's—that he would let a milk-wagon driver tell him how to run his business?"

"It probably might make a difference," said Jimmy, "if he knew, but he will not know—listen, Miss Compton, I have dis-

covered some things there that I have not even dared as yet to tell your father. The whole future of the business may depend upon my being there during the next few weeks. If I wasn't sure of what I am saying I might consider acceding to your demands rather than to embarrass you with certain knowledge which I have."

"You refuse to leave, then?" she demanded.

"I do," he said.

"Very well," she replied; "I shall tell father when he returns to this room just what I know of you."

"Will you tell him," asked Jimmy, "that you went to the training quarters of a prize-fighter, or that you dined unescorted at Feinheimer's at night and were an object of the insulting attentions of such a notorious character as Steve Murray?"

The girl flushed. "You would tell him that?" she demanded. "Oh, of course, I might have known that you would. It is difficult to realize that any one dining at my father's home is not a gentleman. I had forgotten for the moment."

"Yes," said Jimmy, "I would tell him, not from a desire to harm you, but because this is the only way that I can compel you to refrain from something that would result in inestimable harm to your father."

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### JIMMY TELLS THE TRUTH.

MR. COMPTON returned to the room before Jimmy had discovered whether the girl intended to expose him or not. She said nothing about the matter during dinner, and immediately thereafter she excused herself, leaving the two men alone.

During the conversation that ensued Jimmy discovered that Bince had been using every argument at his command to induce Compton to let him go, as well as getting rid of the certified public accountants.

"I can't help but feel," said Compton, "that possibly there may be some reason in what Mr. Bince says, for he seems to feel more strongly on this subject than almost any question that has ever arisen in the plant wherein we differed, and it may be that I am doing wrong to absolutely ignore his wishes in the matter.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Torrance, I have reached the point where I don't particularly relish a fight, as I did in the past. I would rather have things run along smoothly than to have this feeling of unrest and unpleasantness that now exists in the plant. I do not say that you are to blame for it, but the fact remains that ever since you came I have been constantly harassed by this same unpleasant condition which grows worse day by day. There is no question but what you have accomplished a great deal for us of a practical nature, but I believe in view of Mr. Bince's feelings in the matter that we had better terminate our arrangement."

Jimmy suddenly noted how old and tired his employer looked. He realized, too, that for a week he had been fighting an incipient influenza and that doubtless his entire mental attitude was influenced by the insidious workings of the disease, one of the marked symptoms of which he knew to be a feeling of despondency and mental depression, which sapped both courage and initiative.

They were passing through the hallway from the dining-room to the library, and as Compton concluded what was equivalent to Jimmy's discharge, he had stopped and turned toward the younger man. They were standing near the entrance to the music-room in which Elizabeth chanced to be, so that she overheard her father's words, and not without a smile of satisfaction and relief.

"Mr. Compton," replied Jimmy, "no matter what you do with me, you simply must not let those C. P. A.'s go until they have completed their work. I know something of what it is going to mean to your business, but I would rather that the reports come from them than from me."

"What do you mean?" asked Compton.

"I didn't want to be the one to tell you," replied Jimmy. "I preferred that the C. P. A.'s discover it, as they will within the next day or two—you are being systematically robbed. I suspected it before I had been there ten days, and I was absolutely

sure of it at the time I suggested you employ the C. P. A.'s. You are being robbed at the rate of approximately one thousand dollars a week."

"How?" asked Compton.

"I would rather you would wait for the report of the C. P. A.'s," returned Jimmy.

"I wish to know now," said Compton, "how I am being robbed."

Jimmy looked straight into the older man's eyes. "Through the pay-roll," he replied.

For a full minute Compton did not speak. "You may continue with your work in the plant," he said at last, "and we will keep the accountants, for a while at least. And now I am going to ask you to excuse me. I find that I tire very quickly since I have been threatened with influenza."

Jimmy bid his employer good night, and Mr. Compton turned into the library as the former continued along across the hall to the entrance. He was putting on his overcoat when Elizabeth Compton emerged from the music-room and approached him.

"I overheard your conversation with father," she said. "It seems to me that you are making a deliberate attempt to cause him worry and apprehension—you are taking advantage of his illness to frighten him into keeping you in his employ. I should think you would be ashamed of yourself."

"I am sorry that you think that," said Jimmy. "If it was not for your father and you I wouldn't have urged the matter at all."

"You are just doing it to hold your position," retorted the girl, "and now, by threats of blackmail you prevent me from exposing you—you are a despicable cur."

Jimmy felt the blood mounting to his face. He was mortified and angry, and yet he was helpless because his traducer was a woman. Unconsciously he drew himself to his full height.

"You will have to think about me as you please," he said; "I cannot influence that, but I want you to understand that you are not to interfere with my work. I think we understand one another perfectly, Miss Compton. Good night."

And as he closed the door behind him he left a very angry young lady biting her lower lip and almost upon the verge of angry tears.

"The boor," she exclaimed; "he dared to order me about and threaten me."

The telephone interrupted her unhappy train of thoughts. It was Bince.

"I am sorry, Elizabeth," he said, "but I won't be able to come up this evening. I have some important business to attend to. How is your father?"

"He seems very tired and despondent," replied Elizabeth. "That efficiency person was here to dinner. He just left."

She could not see the startled and angry expression of Bince's face as he received this information. "Torrance was there?" he asked. "How did that happen?"

"Father asked him to dinner, and when he wanted to discharge the fellow Torrance told him something that upset father terribly, and urged that he be kept a little while longer, to which father agreed."

"What did he tell him?" asked Bince.

"Oh, some alarmist tale about somebody robbing father. I didn't quite make out what it was all about, but it had something to do with the pay-roll."

Bince went white. "Don't believe anything that fellow says," he exclaimed excitedly; "he's nothing but a crook. Elizabeth, can't you make your father realize that he ought to get rid of the man, that he ought to leave things to me instead of trusting an absolute stranger?"

"I have," replied the girl, "and he was on the point of doing it until Torrance told him this story."

"Something will have to be done," said Bince, "at once. I'll be over to see your father in the morning. Good-by, dear," and he hung up the receiver.

After Jimmy left the Compton home he started to walk down-town. It was too early to go to his dismal little room on Indiana Avenue. The Lizard was still away. He had seen nothing of him for weeks, and with his going he had come to realize that he had rather depended upon the Lizard for company. He was full of interesting stories of the underworld and his dry humor and strange philosophy amused and entertained Jimmy.

And now as he walked along the almost deserted drive after his recent unpleasant scene with Elizabeth Compton he felt more blue and lonely than he had for many weeks. He craved human companionship, and so strong was the urge that his thoughts naturally turned to the only person other than the Lizard who seemed to have taken any particularly kindly interest in him. Acting on the impulse he turned west at the first cross street until he came to a drug-store. Entering a telephone-booth he called a certain number and a moment later had his connection.

"Is that you, Edith?" he asked, and at the affirmative reply, "this is Jimmy Torrance. I'm feeling terribly lonesome. I was wondering if I couldn't drag you out to listen to my troubles?"

"Surest thing you know," cried the girl. "Where are you?" He told her. "Take a Clark Street car," she told him, "and I'll be at the corner of North Avenue by the time you get there."

As the girl hung up the receiver and turned from the phone a slightly quizzical expression reflected some thought that was in her mind. "I wonder," she said as she returned to her room, "if he is going to be like the rest?"

She seated herself before her mirror and critically examined her reflection in the glass. She knew she was good-looking. No need of a mirror to tell her that. Her youth and her good looks had been her stock in trade, and yet this evening she appraised her features most critically, and as with light fingers she touched her hair, now in one place and now in another, she found herself humming a gay little tune and she realized that she was very happy.

When Jimmy Torrance alighted from the Clark Street car he found Edith waiting for him.

"It was mighty good of you," he said. "I don't know when I have had such a fit of blues, but I feel better already."

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"I just had a talk with Mr. Compton," he replied. "He sent for me and I had to tell him something that I didn't want to tell him, although he's got to find it out sooner or later anyway."

"Is there something wrong at the plant?" she asked.

"Wrong doesn't describe it," he exclaimed bitterly. "The man that he has done the most for and in whose loyalty he ought to have the right of implicit confidence, is robbing him blind."

"Bince?" asked the girl. Jimmy nodded. "I didn't like that pill," she said, "from the moment I saw him."

"Nor I," said Jimmy, "but he is going to marry Miss Compton and inherit the business. He's the last man in the place that Compton would suspect. It was just like suggesting to a man that his son was robbing him."

"Have you got the goods on him?" asked Edith.

"I will have as soon as the C. P. A.'s get to digging into the pay-roll," he replied, "and I just as good as got the information I need even without that. Well, let's forget our troubles. What shall we do?"

"What do you want to do?" she asked.

He could not tell by either her tone or expression with what anxiety she awaited his reply. "Suppose we do something exciting, like going to the movies," he suggested with a laugh.

"That suits me all right," said the girl. "There is a dandy comedy down at the Castle."

And so they went to the picture show, and when it was over he suggested that they have a bite to eat.

"I'll tell you," Edith suggested. "Suppose we go to Feinheimer's restaurant and see if we can't get that table that I used to eat at when you waited on me?" They both laughed.

"If old Feinheimer sees me he will have me poisoned," said Jimmy.

"Not if you have any money to spend in his place."

It was eleven thirty when they reached Feinheimer's. The table they wanted was vacant, a little table in a corner of the room and furthest from the orchestra. The waiter, a new man, did not know them, and no one had recognized them as they entered.

Jimmy sat looking at the girl's profile as she studied the menu-card. She was very pretty. He had always thought her that,

but somehow to-night she seemed to be different, even more beautiful than in the past. He wished that he could forget what she had been. And he realized as he looked at her sweet girlish face upon which vice had left no slightest impression to mark her familiarity with vice, that it might be easy to forget her past. And then between him and the face of the girl before him arose the vision of another face, the face of the girl that he had set upon a pedestal and worshiped from afar. And with the recollection of her came a realization of the real cause of his sorrow and depression earlier in the evening.

He had attributed it to the unpleasant knowledge he had been forced to partially impart to her father and also in some measure to the regrettable interview he had had with her, but now he knew that these were only contributory causes, that the real reason was that during the months she had occupied his thoughts and in the few meetings he had had with her there had developed within him, unknown to himself, a sentiment for her that could be described by but one word—love.

Always, though he had realized that she was unattainable, there must have lingered within his breast a faint spark of hope that somehow, some time, there would be a chance, but after to-night he knew there could never be a chance. She had openly confessed her contempt for him, and how would she feel later when she realized that through his efforts her happiness was to be wrecked, and the man she loved and was to marry branded as a criminal?

**(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)**

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# DOMESTIC SCIENCE

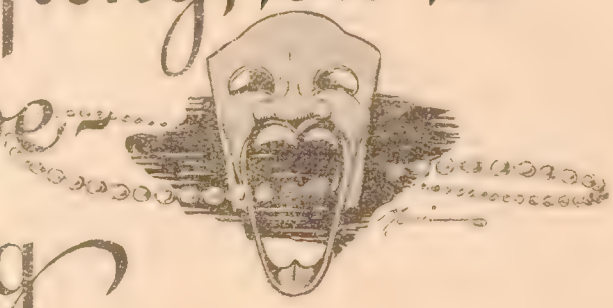
FAIR Margie donned an apron
Of lace and ribbon blue;
Her white hands spread the damask,
And laid the plates for two;
Cheese, crackers, coffee, olives
She brought for our late tea;
And then she cooked shrimp wiggle
On the chafing-dish for me.

"You'll have a dash of pepper,
Or do you like it plain?"
The dainty fingers fluttered
From brass to porcelain;
But what cared I for seasoning,
Or flesh or fowl or fish,
When tempting lips were smiling
Above the chafing-dish?

We sampled her decoction;
Yet long ere I withdrew,
I clasped the blue-bowed darling,
And whispered what was true—
"Your little feed is charming,
But"—as a kiss I took—
"That which tastes best to me, dear,
Is just the small, sweet cook!"

*E. R. Wilson.*

# Trouping on a Shoe-String



by John Wilstach

"THERE is something about the atmosphere of an office that is supposed to inspire confidence," I said, as we paid the first month's instalment of our rooms in the Variety Building to the agent.

He departed hurriedly, and we looked about our new domain of future theatrical activity.

In the outer room Bob had hung several lurid three-sheet posters of "The Girl Who Had No Mother," a melodramatic play of life in a large city—that the small towns hadn't taken to very kindly—which had died a lingering death in Plotstown, Pennsylvania.

I understand the company settled there. It was before the days of the Actors' Equity, and the player's life was one strand after another.

There were a few old frames, with weather-beaten flashlights, of a little musical trick we had tried on the tank towns, called "Wee Hours in New York." These I stuck in the corners of the room. There was a table for a stenographer, when we could afford one, and several regulation chairs.

In the inside office were several desks, more chairs, photographs on the walls, and the manuscript of a new play, "Big Moments," for which we held all rights, including the Swedish.

We had everything to start in with to produce our new play, and in the course of no time at all, to become regular honest-to-goodness managers; everything—except money.

But that didn't worry Bob Warren and me, as yet. Where others could promote some theatrical angel, we saw no reason why our fluent conversation, rainbowed with brilliant promises, and festooned with dreams of success, should gain us a B. R. with which to start our professional activities.

On the door of our offices, in golden letters, blazed our names and calling:

**ROBERT WARREN & THOMAS SMITH**
**Theatrical Enterprises**

Nearly every manager in the show business had changed his name except me. The name of Smith, common in other lines of work, stood out because of its unusualness in the stage world.

"Bob," I said, seriously, "let's go in and sit down, and discuss ways and means."

"Particularly means—we know all the ways."

He passed me a fifth row aisle cigar, some theater treasurer had given him, and we went into "consultation," as the big

bugs call it, when folks they don't wish to see drop in to call.

"Now, Tom," he began, "I depend on you to dig up the bank roll. You still look honest, due to heredity entirely, no doubt, and you have a wealth of words that should be the bait to land some gilded fish. We want to open 'Big Moments' next month somewhere out in the sticks, and then blossom on Broadway. Have you any prospect?"

"I know a Wall Street man named Burton who's so mean he always plays the short side of the market, and he's wealthy, now, with all the stocks sliding toward new low records. He ought to be about ripe. I'll drop down and see him this afternoon."

"Has he ever backed a show before?"

"No, but a friend of his, Frank Marvell, cleaned up on 'Dizzy Darlings,' which he doubtless knows. As we are ab-so-lutely on the level, we'll let him pay out the money himself; of course, we go on a salary, immediately, on account of our managerial activities."

"Well, we have breakfast and *table d'hôte* money for a few weeks, anyway. But I have no desire to take any reefs in my belt."

I glanced down at my rotund figure, which I imagined gave an impression of well-fed prosperity, though I had earned it through a hard fought coast to coast trip at American plan hotels, where they put everything on the table except the kitchen range.

"Did you get that route this morning from the B. & T. office?"

Bob dug a card-board route-book out of his desk, and I tucked it under my arm.

There is nothing more reassuring to show a prospective theatrical investor than a nice route. It has an appearance of stability, and either of the booking offices were only too glad to lay one out for you. It was good business from their view-point, as a route could be canceled with little or no notice, if the show failed to materialize, or turned out to be a bloomer.

"Wish me luck, old hard-boiled," I murmured, as I left the office.

I believe in holding an optimistic thought, no matter how hard it hurts.

Dressed in a checked suit, of an advanced style, King Solomon would have gloried in, with a grey necktie, boasting an emboldened pearl that blushed as pinkly as the real thing, and swinging a malacca cane with a silver top, I emerged from the subway at Fulton Street, and went immediately to Burton's brokerage office.

It was after four, and I knew the activities of the market were over for the day.

Marlow Burton sent out word immediately to admit me to his inner sanctum, principally, I believe, because he didn't know who I was—and you can't tell nowadays who is, and who isn't, a millionaire. With gushing oil-wells and gushing film stars, men who have made money on both, have become so common, Bradstreet's busier than ever.

The broker, whom I knew but by hearsay, I found to be a lean, Shakespearian looking type, with hard, cold, fried-fish eyes, that didn't look any too pleasant.

I gave him one of those Douglas Fairbanks handshakes that show so much vitality and friendliness—if it doesn't break the fingers of the shakee.

"Mr. Burton, I had your name mentioned to me as really one of the conservative men down here on the Street, and I thought it possible I might be able to let you in on a real good thing."

He waved me to a seat.

"We live down here on percentages," he replied, with a half-baked smile. "I'm interested in anything that will make a dollar work twenty-five hours out of the twenty-four."

"Well, in this case I have no doubt I can be a magician. You are aware, I have no doubt, how much money Frank Marvell made on 'Dizzy Darlings' out of a twenty thousand dollar investment."

"Speculation, young man, not investment. An investment is not expected to do anything spectacular, but it is always quite safe. He made what you might call a plunge."

"Yes," I replied, "but he came up, to use a poetic image, with the pearls from the oyster bed of success. He cleaned up over a hundred thousand, and his principal: five hundred per cent is going some for

even the world of practical finance, you will admit. Now, my pardner and I have a proposition that will not take much money to float, that should and *will* score the dramatic hit of the coming theatrical season.

"It is a play called 'Big Moments,' and it simply teems with 'em. The excitement will be so great after the first night that we'll have to make an arrangement with the police department to keep the crowds in order. Here I have a preliminary route for out of town, before getting a theater on Broadway."

I placed open, on the table, the cardboard route book.

"*We'll* open in Stamford for three nights, play a night in Norwalk, and a couple in Bridgeport, to break our show in. Then I've arranged for a split week in Hartford and New Haven. We ought to clean up in the latter town, for that's where all the Yale students spend their fathers' money. Then a week in Buffalo—and we'll be ready to come into New York. I have a lot of influence with the powers that be in the Showlem Offices, and I can get anything I want."

"Young man, you're going too fast. You'll be inviting me to turn my check book over to you, with power of attorney, if I don't watch out. I'll have to have a few days to look into this. I don't mind admitting that I might take a flier, for if you do win you walk right into the pirates' treasure chest—and if you lose you can bury the remains in some storehouse, and cross your fingers the next time. Are you alone in this?"

"My pardner and I. This is our mutual card, and the address of our offices."

"Well, this is Thursday. Drop in Monday morning and I shall give you a verdict. What would it cost to open this show of yours?"

"We could sail, until ready to come into New York, for ten thousand, and then need another five. The cast is small and it's all in one set. I'll make a chart of expenses out for you if—"

"Don't go too fast. I'll give you the final word on Monday, one way or another."

I tried to shake his hand again, to show that there was no hard feelings, but he evaded me.

"This is an opportunity of a lifetime," I affirmed, "so don't let it slip by you."

He chuckled dryly. "It's strange *you* didn't get some wonder opportunity before now—a man as bright as you shouldn't have to be hustling around for someone to back his projects."

"I've been too busy making money for other people," I countered, and timed my exit perfectly.

Returning to our new offices I found Bob strolling up and down with "a-monarch-of-all-I-behold" manner.

He held out his hand, as if he expected me to weigh it down with greenbacks.

"Well, did you land him?" he asked, eagerly, rolling his cigar around in his mouth, with evident relish, like the well-known theatrical magnate upon whom he modeled himself.

"He's put me off until Monday—but we might as well start casting 'Big Moments' in any case."

Bob laughed. "We'll get prosperous-looking actors and actresses, who won't ask for any advance in salary."

"And we need some nice refined feminine company. I shall pick out the leading lady, and you may choose the ingénue."

We both laughed, for those two members of the cast had been chosen, already, in the persons of May Graham and my little Dorothy, who had been in our former companies, and whom some day we hoped to—

But this is a story about a strange conspiracy, not of the more tender and dainty of the emotions.

"But seriously, Bob," I said, "we might as well start engaging as not. And I only think it fair that we should have players in our new show who have had a hard time of it, toiling on the one night stands, instead of those who started on Broadway, after graduating from some swell actors' school. You know there's a lot of talented people who have never heard of the Empire Theatre, and know sooner who's going to play leads in Cokeville, Minn., than what Ethel Barrymore will be seen in this coming season."

"Yes," replied Bob, "they've worked darn hard—and I bet some of the thespians we left in Plotstown, Pa., when 'The Girl Who Had No Mother' faded out, are working harder since. But I agree with you, Tom. Experienced actors and actresses from the tall timber should be given a chance by us—particularly as they come cheaper."

"You have about as much soul as a stage doorkeeper, when some John wants a card slipped back to some Jane in the chorus who's the old bird's daughter."

"We'll call up the Carrlew Agency and ask the manager to send around a few van-loads of players. We might get a model of the set for 'Big Moments' made by the Fulton Scenic Company, also; they don't require a deposit to do that. It kind of gets us under way."

"Right. Momentum has started a lot of things, so let's allow it to start us as Metropolitan managers."

I looked at my watch. It was five o'clock.

"Let's call it a day. You know we have an engagement with the girls at six, and we must go over to our 'bachelor chambers,' as they say on the program, and make ourselves fittingly beautiful."

As before mentioned May Graham and Dorothy West were two ambitious and talented girls who had played the leading woman and ingénue in "Wee Hours in New York," which hadn't been so successful, but their work had shown they were meant for better things. They were both young and pretty, with charming personalities—particularly Dorothy, thought I—and as these possessions for the feminine gender comprise ninety per cent of what the critics call histrionic genius, I had no doubt they'd fit wonderfully in the two leading rôles of "Big Moments."

But until success crowned our efforts with something more awe-compelling than a lot of nice promises, the four of us were just good friends.

Like the men in Robert W. Chambers's stories, however, we didn't see anything wrong in taking the lights of our lives out to dinner, and murmuring a few sweet nothings, now and then, into their supposed shell-like ears—with the present style of hair-dressing, you can't tell much about the latter.

Bob and I resided at the Boardmore Hotel, where we had a little room that the architect must have designed for a midget, but, in our case it did for two grown men, as the address was a good one, when said carelessly: "Oh, look me up at the Boardmore," and the lobby was quite comfortable. Anyway, we slept *well* there, and that was more than some millionaires could do!

After making ourselves as presentable as possible, we went over to where the girls were living, on Forty-fifth Street, and telephoned our names up.

By the time they appeared we were quite hungry, and the twilight shadows were softly falling.

But it was worth the wait, when the two darlings appeared, cool and composed, in light summer dresses.

May and Dorothy were brunette and blond, of extreme types, so Bob and I always had a topic of conversation, whenever they felt like arguing.

Now he took May's arm, and I linked mine with Dorothy's, and we went happily as could be to a nice little Italian *table d'hôte*—where we could afford to be cheerful when the check came.

I related the conversation I had with Burton that afternoon, and concluded that my eloquence undoubtedly would persuade him to come through with the necessary B. R.

In any case we were going to start casting the next day, and so be all ready to open by the time I had secured, if not Burton, some other theatrical angel.

On the strength of our prospects we bought a couple of bottles of Anti-Volstead claret, which might, as in the old days, be "filled with the imprisoned laughter of the peasant girls of France," but was more likely to end by imprisoning Bequanty, the proprietor, if he wasn't careful.

We drank toasts to "Big Moments," and to the theatrical careers of May and Dorothy, and then Bob and I modestly drank to our own managerial future.

It might be said that "a good time was had by all."

Dorothy and I finished the evening by hiring a hovering night-prowling victoria, and taking a ride through Central Park.

We had first meet several years before, when I had been manager of a little dramatic show playing the sticks, in which she has played brilliantly in a not particularly striking rôle. Beauty she had, and personality, and best of all in a girl, from the point of view of the man who loves her, a human sympathy and understanding.

"This is going to be our chance, Tom," she said softly, "and nothing, nothing is going to be allowed to stand in the way of our success, is it, dear?"

The fragrant little word slipped out so sweetly on the night air.

"Not if my efforts go for anything," I answered. "I'm going to work my hardest to put 'Big Moments' over, and give you the chance for which your heart has longed."

"But it is of your success that I am thinking," Dorothy replied, "and I, too, wish to do my bit."

As events transpired it was owing to the darling little creature that, instead of coming to disaster, we came out of the woods of bewilderment and failure.

As we rode through the dark vistas of the park I had some difficulty in not telling her the hopes of the future, that were in my mind, I had promised to keep to myself until the opportunity of success gave me something to offer her — besides my hopes and dreams.

But when we parted that night, I knew, though no words had been said, that Dorothy and I understood what lay in each others' hearts.

II.

Next morning, indeed, we started casting, thinking to help out some of the unfortunates. who'd never been seen on Broadway. But of the scores of actors and actresses who were sent us by the theatrical agency, none of them were even enthusiastic about working unless at salaries large enough to lift the family mortgage. And they'd all been on Broadway for years, whether acting or out of work I couldn't discover by cross-examination.

I left Bob interviewing the line of aspirants, and went out to get bids on the set for our new venture.

Together we were quite busy, and it wasn't any time at all until fateful Monday came, and Burton's decision as to whether or not he would finance our play.

I was down at his office by ten o'clock, as I just couldn't stand the suspense.

He had been there, evidently, just a few minutes before me, for he was just finishing opening his mail as I was ushered in.

With a wave of the hand he motioned me to a seat.

I waited while he read some missive through with great care.

"I have just received," he said, "a report about you and your pardner from the Investors' Protective Association, of which I am a member."

"The what?" I asked.

"The Investors' Protective Association. They say that you and Mr. Warren were responsible for a play called 'The Girl Who Had No Mother,' which stranded somewhere in Pennsylvania, and that you failed to bring the players back. You last put on a little musical comedy entitled 'Wee Hours in New York' that met with indifferent success, and have no Metropolitan standing at all."

"That may be all true," I replied, nettled, "but it doesn't mean we won't strike a success this time. Why, there isn't a successful manager in New York to-day that didn't have his bumps before picking a winner. If a few failures of a man's past were to be held against him, as regards the possibility of his making a success in the future, why no one hardly—but a babe in arms—would be given an opportunity to success."

I was mad clear through, and I wondered how any blamed company had been able to get the facts of my near past so perfectly.

"Well, I won't take the chance of being any stepping-stone," concluded Mr. Burton. "When I step out financially, I want to do so with those who have smelled something besides the perfume of failure. I back winners on principle."

"So there is no use of my trying to per-

suade you that you should pay no attention to this report?"

"Not the slightest. I pay for this kind of information."

He flourished the paper at me.

"You don't suppose I get this inside dope for nothing, do you?"

I did not reply, but made a hasty retreat from the office.

"Investors' Protective Association," indeed. I would call on these birds and see what they had to say about spoiling my chances in this underhand way.

I looked the company in the first telephone book I could find, and discovered the offices were at Forty-third and Fifth Avenue. I subwayed up-town and breezed over there without a moment's delay.

"The manager in charge, please?" I asked, shoving my card at the boy in the outer office.

A dapper youth came out in a few minutes and smiled at me in a friendly manner.

"Is there anything I can do for you, sir?" he asked.

"A lot," I replied. "I desire to know why I am on your list, and details of my past are given out. Is this a private detective agency or what?"

The young man coughed. "Just as the name implies, this company has been formed to protect investors from plausible individuals with charming personalities, who may lead them astray. Any man of means who belongs to our association can send in the name and business of any man whose past record he wishes looked up, and we oblige him with the particulars.

"We merely supply facts to our clients, and it is all supposed to be of a very confidential nature. Have you anything to complain about sir? If so you might see one of our lawyers, and he will explain to you the legal status of the case."

I felt myself starting to froth at the mouth, but I knew that an exhibition of temper would do no good, as things stood.

So I thanked the courteous young gentleman, whom I felt quite sure was inwardly laughing at me, and bounced out of the building, and back to my office.

Bob was boiling, too, after I had explained what had happened to him.

"That's a dickens of a deal," he said, fervently. "Well, every man with money in New York can't belong to this blamed association. Have you got anyone besides Burton down in your little red book?"

"Yes," I replied, "there is a chap named Standish I used to go to school with out West, who has made a pile of money in real estate. I'm going to look him up this afternoon. But I feel just as if the wind had been punched out of me. You'd think we would be too small fry to be on the books of an association like that, eh?"

"That's what is bothering me," replied Bob, "as they used to say in the old melodrama days—there's more in this than comes to the eye."

"Well, I admit that it looks peculiar, but that doesn't lead us anywhere."

"And we're ready to start rehearsals. The cast has all been selected and I have distributed the parts."

"Go ahead, then," I commanded; "order the set to be made, too, confirm the route. We'll open in some way, next month; thanks to the Actors' Equity players cannot demand any money until they've worked for a week, and I can put off paying for the production. Go right along, just as if we had money. I'll dig some up somewhere!"

My appearance of self-confidence fooled Bob, as I intended that it should.

So I left him to attend to practical details, and went out and took a walk.

Since we have been pardners I have found that he was better at actual work, I at planning and giving directions. It was a division of labor not at all distasteful to me, so I encouraged his end of it in every possible manner.

I suddenly decided to try to catch my old school chum before he could get out to lunch, so I strolled over to his offices on Forty-seventh Street, near Fifth Avenue.

Alas, for the hopes of men who need money, and have an old school chum they think fondly of in that direction.

Stanley, his private secretary, told me, was traveling on the continent, but a Mr. Drawin was handling his financial affairs in his absence. This gentlemen, half heartedly, I asked to see.

He was a cold looking bird, feathery white whiskers dripping from either side of his face, which he stroked gently, seeming surprised, each time, to feel them still there.

I told him my name, and business, and of my old friendship with Stanley.

"The fact is," I continued, "I had a wonderful proposition for him to go in on. It's a new play my pardner and I are going to introduce to New York shortly called 'Big Moments,' and we expect it to make more money than 'The Easiest Way,' 'The Man of the Hour,' or 'Peg O' My Heart,' all put together. That sounds like a big order, but this play has *everything*, and will appeal to all, from the little child just lisping her first words of the mother tongue, to the grandmother tottering to her last performance, before going to the old ladies' home. It is the—"

"How much will the original investment be, may I ask?"

"Fifteen or twenty thousand dollars will get us under way," I snapped, eagerly.

Mr. Drawin fondled his wispy whiskers.

"I have just joined an association," he began, and my heart sank, "to which I refer all manner of investments with which I am not familiar. It is called—"

"The Investors' Protective Association," I retorted.

"What?" he asked, mildly. "Do you belong to it?"

I nearly snorted with rage.

"Belong to that band of liars and misleaders! I should say not. Do you mean you are going to refer my proposition to them?"

"I imagine I am, young man. I must protect Mr. Stanley's interests, no matter who objects."

I thought he was sneering, faintly, at me.

The thought of that fiendish association almost choked the words in my throat.

"Have you any idea how many members the society has?" I asked, eagerly.

Old Drawin smiled, pleasantly. "Oh, I can't say, but nearly everyone of any importance, who does any investing, here in New York, belongs to it. Great thing I tell you—to stop a man taking up with wild-cat speculations—for you get good warning from them at the right time—before instead of after—and the cost of belonging is practically nothing."

"You give them a fine recommendation," I growled. "I should think men could use their own judgment."

"*You* would *think* so," he said, chuckling, "but you'd be wrong. Most of us are fools."

"Speak for yourself; don't drag me in," I replied, savagely, and left him sitting there playing with his left whisker, which he was winnowing tenderly.

I was mad clear through, and discouraged as well.

There was no doubt that if this protective association warned one man against my pardner and myself, it surely would others.

How in the world was I to dig up the necessary cash to float our show—that was what I wished to know—and the answer failed to stand out on the background of my mind. All was darkness there.

I walked listlessly back to the office, all the pep taken out of me.

It rather made me feel alive again, however, to see Bob working busily.

"Rehearsals start tomorrow at Bryant Hall," he announced, cheerfully. "I'm going to do the directing myself."

"That'll be good," I replied, sarcastically.

"I've ordered the set, and now, old mopy, you can get started on some press stuff for our opening towns."

"What are we going to use for money?" I asked, with some show of anger.

"I just thought that up," returned my pardner coolly. "The old folks at home will have to go for a few weeks under the danger of having their darlings run down by a machine, or something. We're going to the life insurance company, here in town, where we've taken out our policies, and borrow money on them."

"Didn't know that you could do that."

"It's a wrinkle that you never heard of, eh? Well, it's done in the best families. The money we get will give us a shoe-string to start on, that should run up quickly into a regular bank-roll."

As regards promoting an angel, I made a few feeble attempts in the next week, but everywhere I ran up against the stone wall of the Investors' Protective Association.

We had raised five hundred dollars on our policies, and that would be enough to get us open and under way, as the scenic company, times being a trifle dull, gave us credit on the handsome set being built for us.

Rehearsals went merrily on, " Big Moments " rounding into fine shape.

I jumped out to our opening towns and arranged for the advance work—the advertising, prices at which we were to play, transfer of scenery, railroading of the company and scenery, hotel arrangements; in fact, all the details that would have been taken care of by a press agent—if we had been able to afford one.

That not being the case I substituted, and I had to admit I wasn't so bad.

We were to open on the twenty-fifth of August in Stamford, and I invited the heads of the big theater owning companies in New York either to slip up to Connecticut, or send their representatives, as we were on the lookout for a Broadway opening.

I had papered the house well, so we would have a regular audience of human beings. There is nothing so deadening to play to than rows of empty benches, and you can't tell whether you have a valuable property or not until you get the emotional reaction of a crowd of people.

Where business is concerned I have a cold, calculating eye, but really, " Big Moments " seemed an honest-to-goodness hit from the rise of the curtain. It told the story of the struggles of a young, friendless girl to do the right thing, no matter what the obstacles, and was full of heart touches that couldn't fail to get over.

I knew that the powers that be had scouts out in the front of the house, and I couldn't wait until the next day to breeze back to town and get the verdict.

Dorothy, who played the leading rôle, showed that the experience she had gained in the tank towns had not been wasted, for she still had youth, and if all the rest of the audience loved her as I did, she'd be the greatest success of the season—though in that case jealousy would have poisoned my system.

After the second act the company took five curtain calls, all legitimate, as I never believed in the old gag of working the ushers at that sort of thing.

When the final curtain fell I was as satisfied as a man can be who hasn't any money.

From now on, we would be breezing from town to town on our share of the percentage of the business—what little ready cash Bob and I had raised had disappeared like flakes of snow at the touch of the sun.

I had immediately cancelled the second week. After playing the first, we could either come into New York, or lay off until the opportunity presented itself. The players were wild about the play, and their parts, so I expected no difficulty holding them together.

The next morning I hied me back to the city, and made the rounds of the offices, with all the enthusiasm in the world.

But sadly it was dashed to earth.

Every place I went I received fine news of " Big Moments," but for one reason or another there wasn't a theater on Broadway I could get, without putting up a money guarantee, which of course was impossible.

I knew there was something underhand about this—I guessed it at once, for little producing was yet under way, and from news along the Rialto, I knew that several theaters had no attraction booked for them.

But what was I to do? Here I was with a successful play and no theater to bring it into. And the only way to make a theatrical property valuable for the road is to have a run in New York.

The week's business on the road would just about pay expenses, our shoe-string was gone, and we were in debt to the maker of the production, and elsewhere, bills for rental of rehearsals' hall and for theatrical " props " making a little pile on my desk.

As the week came to a close, and we had to bring the company back to New York, and put the production, for the time being,

in the storehouse, Bob and I lounged around our office the picture of wo.

May and Dorothy, of course, knew all about our troubles, and were sympathetic. It wasn't sympathy we wanted—but success; we'd just as soon give away kind words to someone else.

Then, to cap the climax of my worry and despair, my sweetheart Dorothy disappeared.

Without a word to May she packed up and left the hotel, and for three days, though I searched high and low, as the saying goes, I could find no trace of her.

It was on a Thursday of our first week of downheartedness, after coming back to New York, at noontime, I received a telephone call that sent gladness coursing through my veins.

It was from Dorothy, but she was so mysterious that I asked no questions.

"Tom," she said, "do exactly what I tell you. Go over to the Mutual Bank, and hire a safe deposit box, if it takes your last five dollars. I will meet you outside the door at one-thirty. Take the papers that I shall hand over to you, and put them in that little steel cell of safety, and then I'll explain. Cheer up, our fortune is made."

She rang off before I had a chance to ask any questions.

Conditions, as it was, couldn't possibily be any worse, so I might as well do what I had been told.

Dorothy was no fool, by any manner of means, but what she could have obtained, of any value, I hadn't the slightest idea.

I went right over to the bank, hired a small safe deposit box, for a year, paying my last five bucks for the privilege.

Then, key in hand, I waited outside for Dorothy.

On exactly the half hour she turned the corner of the street, and, rushing up to me, stuffed some manuscripts into my hand.

"Put those away, at once, and then I will explain," she gasped, the poor little girl being all out of breath from hurrying.

I dashed into the bank, hustled downstairs, and crammed the papers into my deposit box.

Naturally I was bursting with curiosity, and when I joined Dorothy, questions were tumbling over one another in my mind, and fighting for expression.

Why had she disappeared, and what was all this mystery about?

"I'm awfully hungry, Tom. Take me some place for luncheon, and I'll explain."

I just had about enough silver left to do what she requested, so I picked a reasonable restaurant on the next block.

When we were seated Dorothy pulled a little slip of newspaper out of her pocket and handed it to me.

"Read that," she said.

I glanced at the clipping:

> STENOGRAPHER wanted, female; good appearance necessary; salary thirty dollars a week; work of a confidential nature; applicant should be a lady. Ask for Mr. Carton, Investors' Protection Association, 43rd and 5th Ave.

"What does this mean?" I gasped.

"You know I went to business college before going on the stage. I saw this advertisement in the *Herald* on Monday, and I said to myself—this is my opportunity to find out something about this company, who has been the means of turning my boy down on raising some money for our play. Besides, I thought there was something very queer in the fact that we were unsuccessful in getting a theater in New York, and I imagined there might be some connection between the two things. I was right."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"That, Tom, dear," she said excitedly, "I'm going to star on Broadway, you're going to get a theater right away for 'Big Moments,' and all the money you need."

"You must be mad, Dorothy!" I gasped.

"No, not crazy—maybe a bit delirious. I have been working late at the office. The reason I disappeared from the hotel was that I didn't want them, if they were at all suspicious, and watched their employees, to link me up with you in any manner—and that was the only way to avert suspicion. Indeed, such a thing never occured to them. I was one of the last in the office, yesterday, filing some papers—when I came upon those that I have given you to put in safe keeping. Can you guess

what they were? Never in a thousand years, I bet."

"I bite," I replied. "You have the center of the stage."

"Didn't you think it queer the association obtained your past theatrical history so easily, and gave you a bad report when you desired to raise money?"

"I did think it rather strange," I admitted.

"The reason is a simple one, when you know it," Dorothy continued. "The Investors' Protective Association has an agreement with the four men who are the leading theatrical powers in New York, to put up to them any query about men in the show business who desires to raise money. Then they have the power to make the association put in a bad report every time. For this service they pay the association twenty thousand a year. They want to keep all the business in their own hands."

"Conspiracy — boycott — restraint of trade," I gasped, overcome with surprise. "But to prove such a thing—"

"A duplicate, signed copy of the contract I found in the files, is what I had you put in the safe deposit vault. Don't you see, dear?"

"I see that with this as a weapon I can sue the association for a small fortune, and get away with it, or better still—"

"Just get what we want, Tom. You have the power, with the harmful publicity this would get the association, alone, not to speak of the managers, to do incalcuable damage. If I were you I'd go to their offices and see if they won't compromise."

"You're the greatest girl in the world," I exclaimed, reaching across the table and kissing her. "Do go back to the office and tell Bob. I'm out to battle."

I paid our check, and left Dorothy to go back to the office alone. I couldn't wait to get to the offices of the Investors' Protective.

When I whispered a few words in the office boy's ear, it didn't take me three minutes to see the President, Mr. Langton.

Without telling him how I got the papers, I told him just what I had—and what I knew I could do. Boycott—conspiracy—restraint of trade—the proof I had was enough to knock his company sky-high, and I would win a suit for almost any amount.

"But I'm reasonable," I finished up.

"What is it that you want?" he asked, quietly, admitting by his silence and pallor the truth of my statements.

"I'm reasonable," I replied. "Get in touch with your principals this afternoon and tell them my demands. I want a contract for my play to open on Broadway at once, continue as long as it does reasonably good business, and fifty thousand dollars in cash. On receipt of this I will return the papers to you."

"I am sure you can depend upon this," returned Langton, who was no fool.

The next morning at ten I received a contract for the Bon Bon Theater, and a certified check for fifty thousand dollars.

Of course, you know 'Big Moments' is the biggest dramatic hit of the year, and maybe, in the society columns, you have read of the engagement of Dorothy West to her manager, who is going to build a new theater for her.

You can take my word for it, the report is true. Thanks to her, our shoe-string, on which we started trouping, has been transformed into a rope of pearls Dorothy now wears.

A thrill a minute.

*Where?*

IN "THE BULL-DOGGER"

*When?*

Week after next.

# The Seventh Man

## Part IV

## by Max Brand

Author of "Trailin'," "The Guide to Happiness," "Tiger," etc.

*A Sequel to "The Untamed" and "The Night Horseman."*

### CHAPTER XXI.

#### THE ACID TEST.

MRS. JOHNNY SOMMERS managed to preserve her dignity while she escorted the visitor into the front room, and even while she asked him to sit down and wait, but once she had closed the door behind her she cast dignity far away and did two steps at a time going up-stairs.

The result was that she reached the room of Betty Neal entirely out of breath; two hundred pounds of fat, good-natured widowhood do not go with speed. She tossed open the door without any preliminary knock and stood there very red with a clearly defined circle of white in the center of each cheek. For a moment there was no sound except her panting and Betty Neal stared wildly at her from above her book.

"He's come!" gasped Mrs. Somers.

"Who?"

"Him!"

As if this odd explanation made everything clear, Betty Neal sprang from her chair and she grew so pale that every freckle stood out.

"Him!" she echoed ungrammatically.

Then: "Where is he? Let me downstairs!

But the widow closed the door swiftly behind her and leaned her comfortable bulk against it.

"You ain't goin'," she asserted. "You ain't goin', leastways not till you got time to think it over."

"I haven't time to think. I—he—"

"That was the way with me," nodded Mrs. Sommers, and her eyes were tragic. "I went ahead and married Johnny in spite of everything, and look at me now—a widder! No, I aint sorry for myself because I was a fool."

"Mrs. Sommers," said Betty, "will you please step out of my way?"

"Honey, for heaven's sake think a minute before you go down and face that man. He's dangerous. When I opened the door and seen him, I tell you the shivers went up my back."

"Is he thin? Is he pale?" cried Betty Neal. "How did he get away? Did he

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 1.

escape? Did they parole him? Did they pardon him? Did he— Let me get down!"

Mrs. Sommers flung away from the door.

"Then go and marry your—man-killer!"

But Betty Neal was already clattering down the stairs. Half way to the bottom her strength and courage ebbed suddenly from her; she went on with short steps, and when at least she closed the parlor door behind her, she was staring as if she looked at a ghost.

Yet Vic Gregg was not greatly changed—a little thinner perhaps, and just now he certainly did not have his usual color. The moment she appeared he jumped to his feet as if he had heard a shot, and now he stood with his feet braced a little to meet a shock, one hand twitching and playing nervously with the embroidered cloth on the table. She did not speak; merely stood with her fingers still gripping the handle of the door as if she were ready to dart away at the first alarm.

A wave of pain went over the face of Vic Gregg and remained looking at her out of his eyes, for all that his single-track, concentrated mind could perceive in her was the thing he took for fear.

"Miss Neal," he said. His voice shook, straightened out again. He made her think of one of her big schoolboys who had forgotten his lesson and now stood cudgeling his memory and dreading that terrible nightmare of "staying after school." She had a wild desire to laugh.

"Miss Neal, I ain't here to try to take up things that can't be took up agin." Apparently he had prepared the speech carefully, and now he went on with more ease: "I'm leavin' these here parts for some place unknown. Before I go I jest want to say I know I was wrong from the beginnin'. All I want to say is that I was jest all sort of tied up in a knot inside and when I seen you with—him—" He stopped. "I hope you marry some gent that's worth you, only they ain't any such. An'—I want to wish you good luck, an' say good-by."

He swept the perspiration from his forehead, and caught up his hat; he had been through the seventh circle of torture.

"Oh, Vic, dear!" cried a voice he had never heard before. Then a flurry of skirts, then arms about him, then tears and laughter, and eyes which went hungrily over his face.

"I been a houn'-dog. My God, Betty, you don't mean—"

"That I love you, Vic. I never knew what it was to love you before."

"After I been a man-killin', lyin', sneakin'—"

"Don't you say another word. Vic, it was all my fault."

"It wasn't It was mine. But if you'd only kind of held off a little and gone easy with me—"

"You didn't give me a chance."

"When I looked back from the road you wasn't standin' in the door."

"I was. And you didn't look back."

"I did."

"Vic Gregg, are you trying to—"

But the anger fled from her as suddenly as it had come.

"I don't care. I'll take all the blame."

"I don't want you to. I won't let you."

She laughed hysterically.

"Vic, tell me that you're free?"

"I'm paroled."

"Thank God! Oh, I've prayed and prayed—Vic, don't talk. Sit down there—so! I just want to look and look at you. There's a hollow, hungry place in me that's filling up again."

"It was Pete Glass," said Gregg brokenly. "He—he trusted me clean through when the rest was lookin' at me like I was a snake. Pete got word to the governor, and so—"

There followed a long interval of talk that meant nothing, and then, as the afternoon waned towards evening, and the evening towards dark, he told her the whole story of the long adventure. He left out nothing, not a detail that might tell against him. When he came to the moment when Glass persuaded him to go back and betray Barry he winced, but set his jaw and plunged ahead.

She, too, paled when she heard that, and for a moment she had to cover her eyes, but she was older by half a life-time than she had been when he was last with her, and now she read below the surface. Be-

sides, Vic had offered to undo what he had done, had offered to stay and fight for Barry, and surely that evened the score!

There was a light rap on the door, and then Mrs. Sommers came in with a tray.

"Maybe you young folks forgot about supper," she said. "I just thought I'd bring in a bite for you."

She placed it on the table, and then lingered, delighted, while her eyes went over them together and one by one. Perhaps Betty Neal was a fool for throwing herself away on a gun-fighter, but at least Mrs. Sommers was furnished with a story which half Alder would know by to-morrow. The walls of her house were not sound proof. Besides, Mrs. Sommers had remarkably keen ears.

"They's been a gentleman here askin' for you, Vic," she said, "but I thought maybe you wouldn't like it much to be disturbed. So I told him you wasn't here."

Her smile fairly glowed with triumph.

"Thanks," said Gregg, "but who was he?"

"I never seen him before. Anyway, it didn't much matter. He wanted to see some of the rest of the boys quite bad: Pete Glass and Ronicky Joe, and Sliver Waldron, and Gus Reeve. He seemed to want to see 'em all particular bad."

"Pete Glass and Ronicky and—the posse!" murmured Vic. He grew thoughtful. "He wanted to see me, too?"

"Very particular, and he seemed kind of down-hearted when he found that Pete was out of town. Wanted to know when he might be back."

"What sort of a lookin' gent was he?" asked Vic, and his voice was sharp.

"Him? Oh, he looked like a tenderfoot to me. Terrible polite, though, and he had a voice that wasn't hardly rougher'n a girl's. Seemed like he was sort of embarrassed jest talkin' to me." She smiled at the thought, but Gregg was on his feet now, his hands on the shoulders of Mrs. Sommers as though he would try to shake information from her loose bulk.

"Look quick, now," he said. "Where did you send him?"

"How you talk! Why, where should I send him? I told him like as not Ronicky and Sliver and Gus would be down to Lorrimer's—"

The groan of Vic made her stop with a gasp.

"What did he look like?"

Mrs. Sommers was very sober. Her smile congealed.

"Black hair, and young, and good-lookin', and b-b-brown eyes, and—"

"God!"

"Vic," cried Betty Neal, "what is it!" She looked around her in terror.

"It's Barry."

He turned towards the door, and then stopped, in an agony of indecision. Betty Neal was before him, blocking the way with her arms outstretched.

"Vic, you sha'n't go. You sha'n't go. You've told me yourself that he's sure death."

"God knows he is."

"You won't go, Vic?"

"But the others! Ronicky—Gus—"

She stammered in her fear.

"That's their look-out! They're three to one. Let them kill—"

"But they don't know him. They've never been close enough to see his face. Besides, no three men—I—he—for God's sake tell me what to do!"

"Stay here—if you love me. I won't let you go. I won't."

"I got to warn them."

"You'll be killed!"

He tore away her hands.

"I got to warn them—but who'll I help? Them three against Dan? He saved me—twice! But—I got to go!"

"If you fight for him first he'll only turn on you afterwards. Vic, stay here."

"What good's my life? What good's it if I'm a yaller dog agin? I'm goin' out—and be a man!"

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE FIFTH MAN.

THE moment Vic Gregg stood in the open air, with the last appeal of Betty ringing still at his ear, he felt a profound conviction that he was about to die and he stood a moment breathing

deeply, taking the faint alkali scent of the dust and looking up to the stars.

It was that moment when night blends with day and there is no sign of light in the sky except that the stars burn more and more bright as the darkness thickens, and Vic Gregg watched the stars draw down more closely and believed that he was seeing this for the last time. Alder seemed inexpressibly dear to him as he stood there through a little space, and the vaguely discernible outlines of the shacks along the street were like the faces of friends. In that house behind him was Betty Neal, waiting, praying for him, and indeed, had it not been for shame, he would have weakened now and turned back. For he hardly knew which way to turn.

He wanted to save Ronicky and the other two from the attack of Barry, yet he would not lay a trap for Dan. To Barry he owed a vast debt; his debt to the three was that which any human being owes to another.

He had to save them from the wolf which ran through the night in the body of a man.

That thought sent him at a run for Captain Lorrimer's saloon. It was lighted brilliantly by the gasoline lamp within, but a short distance away from it he heard no sound and his imagination drew a terrible picture of the big, empty room, with three dead men lying in the center of it where the destroyer had reached them one by one. That was what took the blood from his face and made him a white mask of tragedy when he stepped into the door of the saloon. It was quiet, but half a dozen men sat at the tables in the corner, and among them were Ronicky and the other two. Sliver Waldron was in the very act of pulling back his chair, and perhaps all three had just come in.

Perhaps Barry had come here to look for his quarry and found them not yet arrived; perhaps he was now hunting in other places through the town; perhaps he was even now crouched in the shadow near at hand and ready to attack.

It made the hand of Vic Gregg contract with a cruel pressure when it fell on the shoulder of Sliver Waldron.

"Now, what in hell!" grunted that hardened warrior.

He had no love for Vic Gregg since that day when the posse rode through the hills after him; neither had Ronicky or Gus Reeve, who rose from their chairs as if at a signal.

"Come with me, gents," said Vic. "An' come quick!"

They asked no questions and did not stay to argue the point, for he had that in his face which meant action. He led them outside, and behind the horse shed of the saloon.

"We're alone?" he asked.

"Nothin' in sight."

"Look sharp."

They peered about them through the night, and a wan moon only helped to make the darkness visible.

"Gents, we may be alone now, but we ain't goin' to be alone long. Get your hosses and ride like hell. Barry is in town."

"Vic, you're drunk."

"I tell you, he's been seen!"

"Then by God," growled Sliver Waldron, "lead me to him. I need to have a little talk with that gent."

"Lead you *to* him?" echoed Vic Gregg. "Sliver, are you hungerin' to push daisies?"

"Look here, Bud," answered the older man, and he laid a hand on the shoulder of Vic. "You been with this Barry gent, and you've lived in his house. D'you mean to say you're one of the lot that talk about him like he was a ghost bullets couldn't harm? I tell you, son, they's been so much chatter about him that folks forget he's human. I'm goin' to remind 'em of that little fact."

Vic Gregg groaned. Even while he talked he was glancing over his shoulder as if he feared the shadows under the moon. His voice was half gasp, half whisper.

"Sliver—Ronicky—don't ask me how I know—jest believe me when I say Dan Barry 'll never die by the hand of any man. I tell you—he can see in the dark!"

A soft oath from Gus Reeve; a twitching of Ronicky's head told that this last had taken effect. Sliver Waldron suddenly altered his manner.

"All right, Vic. Trot back into town,

or come with us. We're going to move out."

"The wisest thing you ever done, Sliver."

"I'm feelin' the same way," breathed Gus Reeve.

"S'long," whispered Vic Gregg, and faded into the night, running.

The others, without a word among themselves, gathered their horses and struck down the valley out of Alder. The padding and swish of the sand about the feet of their mounts, the very creaking of the saddle leather, seemed to alarm them, and they were continually turning and looking back. That is, Gus Reeve and Ronicky Joe manifested these signs of trouble, but Sliver Waldron, riding in the center of the trio, never moved his head.

They were hardly well out of the town when a swift rush of hoof beats swept up from behind, and a horseman darted into the pale mist of the valley bending low over his pommel to cut the wind of his riding.

"Who is it?"

"Vic Gregg!" muttered Gus Reeve. "Stir along, Sliver. Vic ain't lingerin' any!"

But Sliver Waldron drew rein, and let his horse go on at a walk.

"Hearin' you talk, Ronicky," he said, "you'd think you was really scared of Dan Barry."

Ronicky Joe stiffened in his saddle and peered through the uncertain light to make out if Sliver were jesting. But the latter seemed perfectly grave.

"A gent would almost think," went on Sliver, "that we three was runnin' away from Barry, instead of goin' out to set a trap for him."

There was something nearly akin to a grunt from Gus Reeve, but Ronicky merely continued to stare at the leader.

"'S a matter of fact," said Sliver, "when Vic was talkin' I sort of felt the chills go up my back. How about you, Ronicky?"

"I'll tell a man," sighed Ronicky. "While Vic was talkin' I seen that devil comin' on his hoss like he done when he broke out of the cabin that might. I'll tell you straight, Sliver. I had my gun drilled on him. I couldn't of missed; but after I fired he kept straight on. It was like puncturin' a shadow!"

"Sure," nodded Sliver. "Shootin' by night ain't ever a sure thing."

Ronicky wiped his heated brow.

"So I sent Vic away before he had a chance to get me real nervous. But when he comes back—well, boys, it 'll be kind of amusin' to watch Vic's face when he saunters into town to-morrow and sees Dan Barry—maybe dead, maybe in the irons. Eh?"

Only a deep silence answered him, but in the interest which his words excited the terror seemed to have left Ronicky and Gus. They rode close, their heads toward Sliver alone.

"There goes Vic," mused Sliver. "There he goes—go on, Mac, you old fool!—scared to death, ridin' for his life. And why? Because he believes some ghost stories he's heard about Dan Barry!"

"Ghost stories?" echoed Reeve. "Some of 'em ain't fairy tales, Sliver."

"Jest name one that ain't!"

"Well, the way he trailed Jim Silent. We've all heard of Silent, and Barry was too good for him."

"Bah," sneered Sliver. "Too good for Silent?" He lied readily enough: "Booze done for Silent long before Barry come along."

"That right?"

"I'll tell a man it is. Mind you, I don't say Barry ain't handy with his gun; but he's done a little and the gents have furnished the trimmin's. Look here, if Barry is the man-eater they say, why did he pick a time for comin' down when the sheriff was out of town?"

"By God!" exclaimed Ronicky. "I never thought of that!"

"Sure you didn't," chuckled Sliver. "But this sucker figures that you and Gus and me will be easy pickin's. He figures we'll do what Vic did—hit for the tall pines. Then he'll blow around how he ran the four of us out of Alder. Be pleasant comin' back to talk like that, eh?"

There was a volley of rapid curses from the other two.

"We'll get this cheap skate, Sliver," suggested Ronicky. "We'll get this ghost and

tie him up and take him back to Alder and make a show of him."

"We will," nodded Sliver. "Have you figured how?"

"Lie out here in the bush. He'll hunt around Alder all night and when the mornin' comes he'll leave and he'll come out this way. We'll be ready for him where the valley's narrow down there. They say his hoss and his dog is as bad as any two ordinary men. Well, that's three of them and here's three of us. It's an even break, eh?"

"Ronicky," murmured Sliver, "I always knowed you had the brains. We'll take this gent and tame him, and run him back to Alder on the end of a rope."

Gus Reeve whooped and waved his hat at the thought.

So the three reached the point where the shadowy walls of the valley narrowed, drew almost together. There they placed the horses in a hollow near the southern cliff, and they returned to take post. There was only one bridle path which wound through the gulch here, and the three concealed themselves behind a thicket of sage-brush to wait.

They laid their plan carefully. Each man was to have his peculiar duty: Gus Reeve, an adept with the rope, would wait until the black stallion was cantering past and then toss his noose and throw the horse. At the same instant, Ronicky Joe would shoot the wolf-dog, and Sliver Waldron would perforate Dan Barry while the latter rolled in the dust, unless, indeed, he was pinioned by the fall of his horse, in which case they would have the added glory of taking him alive.

By the time all these details were settled the pale moonlight was shot through with the rose of dawn. Then, rapidly, the mountains lifted into view, range beyond range, all their gulleys deep blue and purple, and here and there sharp triangles of snow. There was not a cloud, not a trace of mist, and through the crisp, thin air the vision carried as if through a telescope. They could count the trees on the upper ridges; and that while the floor of the valley was still in shadow. This in turn grew brilliant, and everywhere the sage-brush glittered like foliage carved in grey-green quartz.

It was then that they saw Dan Barry, while the dawn was still around them, and before the sun pushed up in the east above the mountains. He came winding down the bridle path with the dawn glittering on the side of Satan, and a dark, swift form skirting on ahead.

"Look at him!" muttered Sliver Waldron. "The damned wolf is a scout. See him nose around that hummock? Watch him smell behind that bush? The black devil!"

Bart, in fact, wove a loose course before his master, running here and there to all points of vantage, as if he knew that danger lurked ahead, but where he came close, with only the narrow passage between the cliffs, he seemed to make up his animal brain that there could be no trouble in so constricted a place, and darted straight ahead.

"They're ours," whispered Waldron. "Steady, boys. Gus, get your rope; get ready!"

Gus tossed the noose a little wider, and gathered himself for the throw, but it seemed as if the wolf saw or heard the movement. He stopped suddenly and stood with his head high; behind him the rider checked the black horse; all three waited.

"He's tryin' to get the wind," chuckled Waldron, "but the wind is agin our faces!"

It was only a slight breeze, but it came directly against the lurking three; and moreover the scent of the sage was particularly keen at this time of the day, and quite sufficient to blur the scent of man even in the keen nostrils of Black Bart. Only for a second or so he stood there sniffing the wind, a huge animal, larger than any wolf the three had ever seen; his face wise in a certain bear-like fashion from the three grey marks in the center of his forehead. Now he trotted ahead, and the stallion broke into a gallop behind.

"My God," whispered Sliver to Gus, "don't spoil that hoss when you daub the rope on him! Look at that action; like runnin' water!"

They came more rapidly. As if the rider knew that a point of danger was there to be passed, he spoke to his mount, and Satan lengthened into a racing gait that blew the

brim of the rider's hat straight up. On they came. The wolf-dog darted past. Then as the horse swept by, Gus Reeve rose from behind his bush and the rope darted snakelike from his hand. The fore-feet of Satan landed in the noose, and the next instant the back-flung weight of Gus tightened the rope, and Satan shot over upon his side, flinging the master clear of the saddle.

It sent him rolling over and over in the dust, and Sliver Waldron was on his feet with both guns in action, sending bullet after bullet towards the tumbling body. Gus Reeve was running towards the stallion, his rope in action to entangle one of the hind-feet and make sure of his prey; Ronicky Joe had leaped up with a yell and blazed away at Back Bart.

It was no easy mark to strike, for the moment the rope shot out from the hand of Gus, the wolf-dog whirled in his tracks and darted straight for the scene of action. It was that, perhaps, which troubled the aim of Ronicky more than anything else, for wild animals do not whirl in this fashion and run for an assailant. He had expected to find himself plugging away at a flying target in the distance; instead, the black monster was rushing straight toward him, silently.

Indeed, all that followed was in silence after that first wild Indian yell from Ronicky Joe. His gun barked, but Black Bart was running like a football player down a broken field, swerving here and there with uncanny speed. Again, again, Joe missed, and then flung up his arm to ward the flying danger. But Black Bart shot from the ground to make his kill. He could bring down the strongest bull in the herd. What was the arm of a man to him? His snakelike head shot through that futile guard; his teeth cut off the scream of Ronicky Joe. Down they went. The gun flew from the hand of Ronicky; for an instant he struggled with hands and writhing legs, and then the murderous teeth of Bart sank deeper, found the life. The dead body was limp, but Bart, shaking his hold deeper to make sure, glared across to the fallen master.

The third man had died for Grey Molly.

All this had happened in a second, and the body of Barry was still rolling when a gun flashed in his hand, drawn while he tumbled. It spat fire, and Sliver Waldron staggered forward drunkenly, waved both his armed hands as if he were trying to talk by signal, and pitched on his face into the dust.

The fourth man had died for Grey Molly.

No gun was destined for Gus Reeve, however. Black Bart had left the lifeless body of his victim and was darting towards the third man; the master was on his knee, raising his gun for the last shot; but Gus Reeve was blind to all that had happened. He saw only the black stallion, the matchless prize of horseflesh. He tossed a loop in the taut rope to entangle a hind foot, but that slackening of the line gave Satan his instant's purchase, and a moment later he was on his feet, whirled, and two iron-hard hoofs crushed the whole framework of the man's chest like an egg-shell. The impact lifted him from his feet, but before that body struck the ground the life was fled from it.

The fifth man had died for Grey Molly.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### BAD NEWS.

NEWS of the killing at Alder, as they call that night's slaughter to this day in the mountain-desert, travelled swiftly, and lost nothing of bulk and burden on the way; so that two days later, when Lee Haines went down for mail to the wretched little village in the valley, he heard the store-keeper retailing the story to an awe-stricken group.

How the tale had crossed all the wild mountains which lay between in so brief a space no man could say, but first there ran a whisper and then a stir, and then half a dozen men came in at once, each with an elaboration of the theme more horrible than the last. The store-keeper culled the choicest fragments from every version, strung them together with a narrative of his own fertile invention, polished off the tale by a few rehearsals in his home, and then placed his product on the open market. The very

first day he kept the store-room well filled from dawn until dark.

And this was the creation to which Lee Haines had to listen, impatient, sifting the chaff for the grains of truth. Down upon Alder, exactly at midnight, had ridden a cavalcade headed by that notorious, half-legendary man-slayer, Dan Barry—Whistling Dan. While his crew of twoscore hardened ruffians held the doors and the windows with leveled rifles, Barry had entered with a gun and a wolf—a wild wolf, and had butchered ten men wantonly.

To add to the mystery, there was no motive of robbery for the crime. One sweeping visitation of death, and then the night-riders had rushed away. Nor was this all, for Sheriff Pete Glass, hearing of the tragedy, had ridden to Rickett, the county seat, and from this strategic point of vantage he was sending out a call for the most practised fighters on the mountain-desert. He wanted twenty men, proved beyond the shadow of question for courage, endurance, speed, and surety in action.

"And," concluded the store-keeper, fixing his eye upon Lee Haines, "if you want a long ride free of charge, and ten bucks a day with chow thrown in—some of you gents ought to go to Rickett and chin with Pete."

Haines waited to hear no more. He even forgot to ask for the Barry mail, swung into his saddle, and rode with red spurs back to the cabin in the mountains. There he drew Buck Daniels aside, and they walked among the rocks while Haines told his story. When it was ended they sat on adjoining boulders and chucked pebbles aimlessly into the emptiness beyond the cliff.

"Maybe," said Buck suddenly, "it wasn't Dan at all. He sure wouldn't be ridin' with no crowd of gents like that."

"A fool like that store-keeper could make a crowd of Indians out of one papoose," answered Haines. "It was Dan. Who else would be traipsing around with a dog that looks like a wolf—and hunts men?"

"I remember when Dan cornered Jim Silent in that cabin, and all Jim's gang was with him. Black Bart—"

"Buck," cut in Haines, "you've remembered plenty."

After a moment: "When are you going in to break the news to Kate?"

Buck Daniels regarded him with angry astonishment.

"Me?" he cried. "I'd sooner cut my tongue out!" He drew a great breath. "I feel like—like Dan was dead!"

"The best thing for Kate if he were."

"That's a queer thing to say, Lee. The meat would be rotted off your bones six years ago in Elkhead if it hadn't been for Whistlin' Dan."

"I know it, Buck. But I'll tell you straight that I could never feel towards Dan as if he were a human being, but a wolf in the hide of a man. He turned my blood cold; he always has."

Buck Daniels groaned aloud as thoughts poured back on him.

"Of all the pals that ever a man had," he said sadly, "there never was a partner like Whistlin' Dan. There was never another gent that would go through hell for you jest because you'd eaten meat with him. The first time I met him I tried to double-cross him, because I had my orders from Silent. And Dan played clean with me—by God, he shook hands with me when he left."

He straightened a little.

"So help me God, Lee, I've never done a crooked thing more since I shook hands with Dan that day." He sat silent, but breathing hard. "Well, this is the end of Whistlin' Dan. The law will never let up on him now; but I tell you, Haines, I'm sick inside and I'd give my right hand plumb to the wrist to set him straight and bring him back to Kate. Go in and tell her, Lee. I—I'll wait for you here."

"You'll be damned," cried Haines. "I've done my share by bringing the word this far. You can relay it."

Buck Daniels produced a silver dollar.

"Heads or tails?"

"Heads!" said Haines.

The dollar spun upwards, winking, and clanked on the rocks, tails up. Haines stared at it with a grisly face.

"Good God," he muttered, "what'll I do, Buck, if she faints?"

"Faints?" echoed Daniels, "there's no fear of that! The first thing you'll have to do is to saddle her horse."

"Now, what in hell are you driving at?"

"She'll be thinkin' of Joan. God knows she worried enough because Dan hasn't brought the kid back before this, but when she hears what he's done now, she'll know that he's wild for keeps and she'll be on the trail to bring the young 'un home."

He turned his back cleanly on the house and set his shoulders tense.

"Go on, Lee. Be a man."

He heard the steps of Haines start briskly enough for the house, but they trailed away, slowly and more slowly, and finally there was a long pause.

"He's standing at the door," muttered Buck. "Thank God I ain't in his boots."

He jerked out his papers and tobacco, but in the very act of twisting the cigarette tight the door slammed and he ripped the flimsy thing in two. He started to take another paper, but his fingers were so unsteady that he could not pull away the single sheet of tissue which he wanted. Then his hands froze in place.

A faint tapping came out to him.

"He—he's rapping on her door," whispered Buck, and remained fixed in place, his eyes staring straight before him.

The seconds slipped away.

"He's turned yaller," murmured Buck. "He couldn't do it. It'll be up to me!"

But he had hardly spoken the words when a low cry came out to him from the house. Then the silence again, but Buck Daniels began to mop his forehead.

After that, once, twice, and again he made the effort to turn towards the house, but when he finally succeeded it was whole minutes later, and Lee Haines was leading a saddled horse from the corral. Kate stood beside the cabin, waiting.

When he reached her, she was already mounted. He halted beside her, panting, his hand on her bridle.

"Don't do it, Kate!" he pleaded. "Lemme go with you. Lemme go and try to help."

The brisk wind up the gulch set her clothes fluttering, stirred the hair about the rim of her hat, and she seemed to Buck more gracefully, more beautifully young than he had ever seen her; but her face was like stone.

"You'd be no help," she answered. "When I get to the place I may have to meet—him! Would you face him, Buck?"

His hand fell away from the bridle. It was not so much what she said, as the cold, steady voice with which she spoke that unnerved him. Then, without a farewell, she turned the brown horse around and struck across the meadow at a swift gallop. Buck turned to meet the sick face of Haines.

"Well?" he said.

"Let me have that flask."

Buck produced a metal "life-saver," and Haines with nervous hands unscrewed the top and lifted it to his lips. He lowered it after a long moment and stood bracing himself against the wall.

"It was hell, Buck. God help me if I ever have to go through a thing like that again."

"I see what you done," said Buck angrily. "You walked right in and took your story in both hands and knocked her down with it. Haines, of all the ornery, thick-headed cayuses I ever see, you're the most outbeatin'est!"

"I couldn't help it."

"Why not?"

"When I went in she took one look at me and then jumped up and stood as straight as a pine tree.

"'Lee,' she said, 'what have you heard?'

"'About what?' I asked her, and I looked sort of indifferent."

"Bah!" snorted Buck, "She could see death an' hell written all over your face, most like."

"I suppose," muttered Haines, "I—I was sick!

"'Tell me!' she said, coming close up.

"'He's gone wild again,' was all I could put my tongue to.

"Then I spurted it out. I had to get rid of the damned story some way, and the quickest way seemed the best—how Dan rode into Alder and did the killing.

"When I got to that she gave one cry."

"I know," said Buck, shuddering. "Like something dying."

"Then she asked me to saddle her horse. I begged her to let me go with her, and she said to me what she just now said to you. And so I stayed. What good could we do against that devil?"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE MUSIC.

TO the last ravine Kate's horse carried her easily enough, but that mountain pass was impenetrable through all its length to anything except the uncanny agility of Satan, and so she left the cow-pony in the bottom of the gorge and climbed the last rise on foot.

On the mountainside above her, it was not easy to locate the cave, for the slope was clawed into ravines and confused with meaningless criss-cross gulches. Whatever scrub evergreens grew there stood under the shade of boulders which threatened each instant to topple over and go thundering to the base. She had come upon the cave by chance in her ride with Dan, and now she hunted vainly through the great stones for the entrance. A fresh wind, chill with the snows of the upper peaks, pulled and tugged at her and cut her face and hands with flying bits of sand. It kept up a whistling so insistent that it was some time before she recognized in the hum of the gale a differing note, not of pleasant music, but a thin, shrill sound that blended with the voice of the wind.

The instant she heard it she stopped short on the leeside of a tall rock and looked about her in terror. The mountains walked away on every side, and those resolute masses gave her courage. She listened, for the big rock cut away the breath of the wind about her ears and she could make out the whistling more clearly. It was a strain as delicate as a pin-point ray of light in a dark room, but it made Kate tremble.

Until the sound ended she stayed there by the rock, hearkening, but the moment it ceased she gathered her resolution with a great effort and went straight toward the source of the whistling. It was only a moment away, although the wind had made it seem farther, and she came on the tall, narrow opening with Joan sitting on a rock just within.

Instead of the blue cloak, she was wrapped in a tawny hide, and the yellow hair blew this way and that unsheltered from the wind. The loneliness of the little figure made Kate's heart ache, made her pause on her way, and while she hesitated, Joan's head rested back against the rock, her eyes half closed, her lips pursed, she began to whistle that same keen, eery music.

It brought Kate to her in a rush.

"Oh Joan!" she cried. "My baby!"

And she would have swept the child into her arms, but Joan slipped out from under her very fingers and stood a little distance off with her hands pressed against the wall on either side of her, ready to dart one way or the other. It was not sudden terror, but rather a resolute determination to struggle against capture to the end, and her blue eyes were blazing with excitement. Kate was on her knees with her arms held out.

"Joan, dear, have you forgotten munner?"

The wildness flickered away from the eyes of the child little by little.

"Munner?" she repeated dubiously.

No shout of welcome, no sudden rush, no arms to fling about her mother. But if her throat was dry and closed Kate allowed no sign of it to creep into her voice.

"Where's Daddy Dan?"

"He's gone away."

"Where?"

"Oh—over there!"

The mother rose slowly to her feet and looked out across the mountains as if in search of aid. For her mind had harked back to that story her father used to tell of the coming of Dan Barry; how he had ridden across the hills one evening and saw, walking against the sunset, a tattered boy who whistled strangely as he went, and when old Joe Cumberland asked where he was going he had only waved a vague hand toward the north and answered "Oh—over there."

It was sufficient destination for him; it was sufficient explanation now for the child. She remembered how she, herself a child then, had sat at her father's table and watched the brown face of the strange boy

with fascination, and the wild, quick eyes which went everywhere and rested in no one place. They were the eyes which looked up to her now from Joan's face, and she felt suddenly divorced from her baby, as if all the blood in Joan were the blood of her father.

"He left you here alone?" she murmured.

The child looked at her with a sort of curious amazement.

"Joan isn't alone."

She whistled softly, and around the corner of the rock peered two tiny, beady-bright eyes, and the sharp nose of a coyote puppy. It disappeared at once at the sight of the stranger, and now all the strength went from Kate. She slipped helplessly down, and sat on a boulder trying to think, trying to master the panic which chilled her; for she thought of the day when Dan brought home to the Cumberland Ranch the wounded wolf-dog, Black Bart.

But the call of Joan had traveled far, and now a squirrel came in at a gallop with his vast tail bobbing behind him, and ran right up the rock until he was on the shoulder of the child. From this point of vantage, however, he saw Kate, and was instantly on the floor of the cave and scurrying for the entrance, chattering with rage.

The wild things came to Joan as they came to her father, and the eyes of the child were the eyes of Dan Barry. It came home to Kate and she saw the truth for the first time in her life. She had struggled to win him away from his former life, but now she knew that it was not habit which controlled him, for he was wild by instinct, by nature. Just the tang of his untamed blood had turned the child to this; and a few days more of life with him would leave her wild forever.

"He left you alone here!" she repeated fiercely. "Where a thousand things might happen. Thank God I've found you."

Even if her words conveyed little meaning to Joan, the intonation carried a message which was perfectly clear.

"Don't you like Daddy Dan?"

"Joan, Joan, I love him! Of course."

But Joan sat with a dubious eye which quickly darkened into fear.

"Oh, munner, don't take us back!"

Such horror and terror and sadness mixed! The tears rushed into the eyes of Kate.

"Do you want to stay here, sweetheart?"

"Yes, munner."

"Without me?"

At first Joan shook her head decidedly, but thereafter she quickly became thoughtful.

"No, except when we eat."

"You don't want me here at dinner-time? Poor munner will get so hungry."

A great concession was about to burst from the remorseful lips of Joan, but again second thought sobered her. She remained in a quandary, unable to speak.

"Don't you want me even when you wake up at night?"

"Why?"

"Because you're so afraid of the dark."

"Joan's not afraid. Oh, no! Joan loves the dark."

If Kate maintained a smile, it was a frozen grimace. It had only been a few days—hardly yesterday—that Joan left, and already she was a little stranger. Suppose Dan should refuse to come back himself; refuse even to give up Joan! She started up, clutching the hand of the child.

"Quick, Joan, we must go!"

"Joan doesn't want to go!"

"We'll go—for a little walk. We—we'll surprise Daddy Dan."

"But Daddy Dan won't come back for long, long time. Not till the sun is away down behind that hill."

That should mean two hours, at least, thought Kate. She could wait a little.

"Joan, what taught you not to be afraid of the dark?"

This problem made Joan look about her for an answer, but at length she called softly: "Jackie!"

She waited, and then whistled; at once the bright eyes of the little coyote appeared around the edge of the rock.

"Come here!" she commanded.

He slunk out with his head turned towards Kate and cowered at the feet of the child. And the mother cringed inwardly at the sight; all wild things which hated man instinctively with tooth and claw were

the friends, the allies of Whistling Dan, and now Joan was stepping in her father's path. A little while longer and the last vestige of gentleness would pass from her. She would be like Dan Barry, following calls which no other human could even hear. It meant one thing: at whatever cost, Joan must be taken from Dan and kept away.

"Jackie sleeps near me," Joan was saying. "We can see in the dark, can't we, Jackie?" There was a luminous flare in the child's eyes as she bent over the beast.

She lifted her head, and the moment her compelling eyes left him, Jackie scooted for shelter. The first strangeness had worn away from Joan and she began to chatter away about life in the cave, and how Satan played there by the firelight with Black Bart, and how, sometimes—wonderful sight! Daddy Dan played with them. The recital was quite endless as they pushed farther and farther into the shadows, and it was the uneasiness which the dim light raised in her that made Kate determine that the time had come to go home.

"Now," she said, "we're going for that walk."

"Not away down there!" cried Joan.

Kate winced.

"It's lots nicer here, munner. You'd ought to just see what we have to eat! And my, Daddy Dan knows how to fix things."

"Of course he does. Now put on your hat and your cloak, Joan."

"This is lots warmer, munner."

"Don't you like it?" she added in alarm, stroking the delicate fur.

"Take it off!"

Kate ripped away the fastenings and tossed the skin far away.

"Oh!" breathed Joan.

"It isn't clean! It isn't clean," cried Kate. "Oh, my poor, darling baby! Get your bonnet and your cloak, Joan, quickly."

"We're coming back?"

"Of course."

Joan trudged obediently to the side of the cave and produced both articles, sadly rumpled, and Kate buttoned her into them with trembling fingers. Something akin to cold made her shake now. It was very much like a child's fear of the dark.

But as she turned towards the entrance to the cave and caught the hand of Joan, the child wrenched herself free.

"We'll never come back," she wailed. "Munner, I won't go!"

"Joan, come to me this instant."

"I won't go!"

"Joan!"

A resolute silence answered her, and when she went threateningly forward, Joan shrank into the shadow near the rock. It was the play of light striking slantwise from the entrance, no doubt, but it seemed to Kate that a flicker of yellow light danced across the eyes of the child. And it stopped Kate—took her breath with a new terror.

Dan Barry, in the old days, had lived a life as quiet as a summer's day until the time Jim Silent struck him down in the saloon; and she remembered how Black Bart had come for her and led her to the saloon, and how she found Dan lying on the floor, streaked with blood, very pale; and how she had kneeled by him in a panic, and how his eyes had opened and stared at her without answer and the yellow, inhuman light swirled in them until she rose and backed out the door and fled in a hysteria of fear up the road.

That had been the beginning of the end for Dan Barry, that instant when his eyes changed; and now Joan—she ran at her swiftly and gathered her into her arms. One instant of wild struggling, and then the child lay still, her head straightened a little, a shrill whistle pealed through the cave.

Kate stopped that piercing call with her hand, but when she turned she saw in the entrance the dark body of Bart and his narrow, snakelike head.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE BATTLE.

"IT'S Dan," whispered Kate. "He's come."

"Maybe Daddy Dan sent Bart back alone, munner."

"Does he do that often? Come quickly, Joan. Run!"

She ran towards the entrance, stumbling over the uneven ground and dragging Joan

behind her, but when they came close the wolf-dog bristled and sent down the cavern a low growl that stopped them like an invisible barrier.

The softest sounds in his register were ominous warnings to those who did not know Black Bart, but Kate and Joan understood that this muttering, harsh thunder, was an ultimatum. If she had worn her revolver, a light, beautifully mounted thirty-two which Dan had given her, Kate would have shot the wolf and gone on across his body; for she had learned from Whistling Dan to shoot quickly as one points a finger and straight by instinct.

Even as she stood there barehanded she looked about her desperately for a weapon, seeing the daylight and the promise of escape beyond and only this dumb beast between her and freedom.

Once before, many a year ago, she had gone like this, with empty hands, and subdued Black Bart simply through the power of quiet courage and the human eye. She determined to try again.

"Stand there quietly, Joan. Don't move until I tell you."

She made a firm step towards Bart.

"Munner, he'll bite!"

"Hush, Joan. Don't speak."

At her forward movement the wolf-dog flattened his belly to the rock, and she saw his forepaws, large, almost, as the hands of a man, dig and work for a purchase from which he could throw himself at her throat.

"Steady, Bart!"

His silence was more terrible than a snarl; yet she stretched out her hand and made another step. It brought a sharp tensing of the body of Bart—the fur stood up about his throat like the mane of a lion, and his eyes were a devilish green. Another instant she kept her place, and then she remembered the story of Haines—how Bart had gone with his master to that killing at Alder. If he had killed once he would kill again; wild as he had been on that other time when she quelled him, he had never before been like this.

The courage melted out of her; she forgot the pleasant day outside; she saw only those blazing eyes and shrank back towards the center of the cave. The muscles of the wolf relaxed visibly, and not till that moment did she realize how close she had been to the crisis.

"Bad Bart!" cried Joan, running in between. "Bad, bad dog!"

"Stop, Joan! Don't go near him!" Kate called out.

But Joan was already almost to Bart. When Kate would have run to snatch the child away that deep, rattling growl stopped her again, and now she saw that Joan ran not the slightest danger. She stood beside the huge beast with her tiny fist raised.

"I'll tell Daddy Dan on you," she shrilled.

Black Bart made a furtive, cringing movement towards the child, but instantly stiffened again and sent his warning down the cave to Kate. Then a shadow fell across the entrance and Dan stood there with Satan walking behind. His glance ran from the bristling body of Bart to Kate, shrinking among the shadows, and lingered without a spark of recognition.

"Satan," he ordered, "go on in to your place."

The black stallion glided past the master and came on until he saw Kate. He stopped, snorting, and then circled her with his head suspiciously high, and ears back until he reached the place where his saddle was usually hung.

There he waited, and Kate felt the eyes of the horse, the wolf, the man, and even Joan, curiously upon her.

"Evenin'," nodded Dan; "might you have come up for supper?"

That was all. Not a step towards her, not a smile, not a greeting, and between them stood Joan, her hands clasped idly before her while she looked from face to face, trying to understand. All the pangs of heart which come to woman between girlhood and old age went burningly through Kate in that breathing space, and afterwards she was cold, and saw herself and all the others clearly.

"I haven't come for supper. I've come to bring you back, Dan."

Not that she had the slightest hope that he would come, but she watched him curiously, almost as if he were a stranger, to see how he would answer.

"Come back?" he echoed. "To the cabin?"

"Where else?"

"It ain't happy there." He started. "You come up here with us, Kate."

"And raise Joan like a young animal in a cave?"

He looked at her with wonder, and then at the child.

"Ain't you happy, Joan, up here?"

"Oh, Daddy Dan, Joan's *so* happy!"

"You see," he said to Kate, "she's terribly happy."

It was his utter simplicity which convinced her that arguments and pleas would be perfectly useless. Just behind the cool command which she kept over herself now was hysteria. She knew that if she relaxed her purposefulness for an instant the love for him would rush over her, weaken her. She kept her mind clear and steady with a great effort which was like divorcing herself from herself. When she spoke, there was another being which stood aside listening in wonder to the words.

"You've chosen this life, Dan. I won't blame you for leaving me this time any more than I blamed you the other times. I suppose it isn't you. It's the same impulse, after all, that took you south after—after the wild geese." She stopped, almost broken down by the memory, and then recalled herself sternly. "It's the same thing that led you away after Mac Strann through the storm. But whether it's a weakness in you or the force of something outside your control, I see this thing clearly; we can't go on. This is the end."

He seemed troubled, vaguely, as a dog is anxious when it sees a child weep and cannot make out the reason.

"Oh, Dan," she burst out, "I love you more than ever! If it were I alone I'd follow you to the end of the world, and live as you live, and do as you do. But it's Joan. She has to be raised as a child should be raised. She isn't going to live with—with wild horses and wolves all her life. And if she stays on here, don't you see that the same thing which is a curse in you will grow strong and be a curse in her? Don't you see it growing? It's in her eyes! Her step is too light. She's lost her fear of the dark. She's drifting back into wildness. Dan, she has to go with me back to the cabin!"

At that she saw him start again, and his hand went out with a swift, subtle gesture towards Joan.

"Let me have her! I have to have her! She's mine!" Then more gently: "You can come to see her whenever you will. And, finally pray God you will come and stay with us always."

He had stepped to Joan while she spoke, and his hands made a quick movement of cherishing about her golden head, without touching it. For the first and the last time in her life, she saw something akin to fear in his eyes.

"Kate, I can't come back. I got things to do—out here!"

"Then let me take her."

She watched the wavering in him.

"Things would be kind of empty if she was gone, Kate."

"Why?" she asked bitterly. "You say you have your work to do—out here?"

He considered this gravely.

"I dunno. Except that I sort of need her."

She knew from of old that such questions only puzzled him, and soon he would cast away the attempt to decide, and act. Action was his sphere. There was only one matter in which he was unfailingly, relentlessly the same, and that was justice. To that sense in him she would make her last appeal.

"Dan, I can't take her. I only ask you to see that I'm right. She belongs to me. I bought her with pain."

It was a staggering blow to Whistling Dan. He took off his sombrero and passed his hand slowly across his forehead, then looked at her with a dumb appeal.

"I only want you to do the thing you think is square, Dan."

Once more he winced.

Then, slowly—"I'm tryin' to be square. Tryin' hard. I know you got a claim in her. But it seems like I have, too. She's like a part of me, mostly. When she's happy, I feel like smilin' sort of. When she cries it hurts me so's I can't hardly stand it."

He paused, looking wistfully from the staring child to Kate.

He said with sudden illumination, "Let her do the judgin'! You ask her to go to you, and I'll ask her to come to me. Ain't that square?"

For a moment Kate hesitated, but as she looked at Joan it seemed to her that when she stretched out her arms to her baby nothing in the world could keep them apart.

"It's fair," she answered. Dan dropped to one knee.

"Joan, you got to make up your mind. If you want to stay with—with Satan—speak up, Satan!"

The stallion whinnied softly, and Joan smiled.

"With Satan and Black Bart"—the wolf-dog had glided near, and now stood watching—"and with Daddy Dan, you just come to me. But if you want to go to—to munner, you just go." On his face the struggle showed—the struggle to be perfectly just. "If you stay here, maybe it'll be cold, sometimes when the wind blows, and maybe it'll be hard other ways. And if you go to munner, she always be takin' care of you, and no harm'll ever come to you, and you'll sleep soft between sheets, and if you wake up in the night she'll be there to talk to you. And you'll have pretty little dresses with all kinds of colors on 'em, most like. Joan, do you want to go to munner, or stay here with me?"

Perhaps the speech was rather long for Joan to follow, but the conclusion was plain enough; and there was Kate, she also upon one knee and her arms stretched out.

"Joan, my baby, my darling!"

"Munner!" whispered the child and ran towards her.

A growl came up in the throat of Black Bart and then sank away into a whine; Joan stopped short, and turned her head.

"Joan!" cried Kate.

Anguish made her voice loud, and from the loudness Joan shrank, for there was never a harsh sound in the cave except the growl of Bart warning away danger. She turned quite around and there stood Daddy Dan, perfectly erect, quite indifferent, to all seeming, as to her choice. She went to him with a rush and caught at his hands.

"Oh, Daddy Dan, I don't want to go. Don't you want Joan?" He laid a hand upon her head, and she felt the tremor of his fingers; the wolf-dog lay down at her feet and looked up in her face; Satan, from the shadows beyond, whinnied again.

After that there was not a word spoken, for Kate looked at the picture of the three, saw the pity in the eyes of Whistling Dan, saw the wonder in the eyes of Joan, saw the truth of all she had lost. She turned towards the entrance and went out, her head bowed, stumbling over the pebbles.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE TEST.

THE most that could be said of Rickett was that it had a courthouse and plenty of quiet so perfect that the minds of the office-holders could turn and turn and hear no sound saving their own turning. There were, of course, more buildings than the courthouse, but not so many that they could not be grouped conveniently along one street. The hush which rested over Rickett was never broken except in the periods immediately after the spring and fall round-ups when the saloons and gaming tables were suddenly flooded with business. Otherwise it was a rare event indeed which injected excitement into the village.

Such an event was the gathering of Sheriff Pete Glass's posse.

There had been other occasions when Pete and officers before his time had combed the county to get the cream of the fighting men, but the gathering of the new posse became different in many ways. In the first place the call for members was not confined to the county, for though it stretched as large as many a minor European kingdom, it had not the population of a respectable manufacturing town, and Pete Glass went far beyond its bounds to get his trailers.

Everywhere he had the posters set up and on the posters appeared the bait. The state began the game with a reward of

three thousand dollars; the county plastered two thousand dollars on top of that to make it an even five—then the town of Alder dug into its deep pockets and produced twenty-five hundred, while disinterested parties added contributions which swelled the total to a round ten thousand.

Ten thousand dollars reward for the man described below, dead or alive. Ten thousand dollars which might be earned by the investment of a single bullet and the pressure on a trigger; and above this the fame which such a deed would bring—no wonder that the mountain-desert hummed through all its peaks and plains, and stirred to life. Moreover, the news had gone abroad, the tale of the killing at Alder and everything that went before.

It went west; it appeared in newspapers; it cropped up at firesides; it gave a spark of terror to a myriad conversations; and everyone in Rickett felt that the eye of the nation was upon it; everyone in Rickett dreamed nightly of the man described: "Daniel Barry, called Whistling Dan, about five feet nine or ten, slender, black hair, brown eyes, age about thirty years."

Secretly, Rickett felt perfectly convinced that Sheriff Pete Glass alone could handle this fellow and trim his claws, for they knew how many a "bad man" had built a reputation high as Babel and baffled posses and murdered right and left, until the little dusty man on the little dusty roan went out alone and came back alone, and another fierce name went from history into legend.

However, there were doubters, since this affair had new earmarks. It had been buzzed abroad that Whistling Dan was not only the hunted, but also the hunter, and that he had pledged himself to strike down all the seven who first took his trail. Five of these were already gone; two remained, and of these two one was Vic Gregg, no despicable fighter himself, and the other was no less than the invincible little sheriff himself.

To imagine the sheriff beaten in the speed of his draw, or the accuracy of his shot was to imagine the First Cause, Infinity, or whatever else is inconceivable; nevertheless, there were such possibilities as bullets fired at night through the window, and attacks from the rear. So Rickett waited, and held its breath and kept its eyes rather more behind than in front.

In the mean time there was no lack of amusement, for from the four corners, blown by the four winds, men rode out of the mountain-desert and drifted into Rickett to seek for a place on that posse. Twenty men—that was the goal the sheriff had set. Twenty men trained to a hair. Beside the courthouse was a shooting gallery not overmuch used except during the two annual seasons of prosperity and reckless spending, and Pete Glass secured this place to test out applicants.

After they passed this trial they were mustered into his presence, and he gave them an examination for himself. Just what he asked them or what he told them could never be known, but some men came from his presence very red, and others extremely pale, and some men blustered, and some men swore, and some men rode hastily out of town and spoke not a word, but few, very few, were those who came out wearing a little badge on their vest with the pride of a Knight of the Garter.

At first the hordes rode in, young and old, youths keen for a taste of adventure, rusty fellows who had once been noted warriors; but these early levies soon discovered that courage and willingness was not so much valued as accuracy, and the old-timers learned, also, that accuracy must be accompanied by speed; and even when a man possessed both these qualities of hand and eye the gentle, inscrutable little man in his office might still reject them for reasons they could not guess.

This one thing was certain—the next time Pete Glass ran for office he would be beaten even by a greaser. He made enemies at the rate of a hundred a day during that period of selection.

Still the twenty was not recruited to the full. Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen were gathered into the fold, but still five men were lacking to complete the toll. Most men would have started their man-hunt with that formidable force, but Pete Glass was methodical. In his own heart of hearts

he would have given his hope of heaven to meet Barry face to face and hand to hand, and see which was the better man, but Pete Glass owed a duty to his state before he owed a duty to himself. He stuck by his first plan. And every day the inhabitants of Rickett gathered at the shooting gallery to watch the tests and wonder at the successes and smile at the failures.

It was a very hard test which the sheriff had imposed. A man stood to one side of the iron-plate back wall, which served as the target. He stood entirely out of sight and through an aperture in the side wall, at a signal, he tossed a round ball of clay, painted white. The marksman stood a good ten paces off, and he must strike that clay ball as it passed across the target. The balls were so small that even to strike them when they were stationary was a difficult task, and to hit them in motion was enough to task the quickest eye and the cunningest hand.

It was old Pop Giersberg who stood with his ancient forty-five behind the counter, with his feet braced, on this bright morning, and behind him half of Rickett was gathered.

"D'you give me warnin', son?" he inquired of the man at the counter.

"Nary a warnin'," grinned the other, who was one of the chosen fifteen.

He wished Pop well. So did they all, but they had seen every man fail for two days at that target and one and all they had their doubts. Pop had been a formidable man in his day, but now his hand was stiff and his hair gray. He was at least twenty years older than he felt.

He had hardly finished asking his question when a white ball was tossed across the target. Up came the gun of Pop Giersberg, exploded, and the bullet clanged on the iron; the white ball floated idly on across the wall and disappeared on the other side.

"Gimme another chance!" pleaded Pop, with a quaver in his voice. "That was just a try to get my eye in shape."

"Sure," chuckled the deputy. "Everybody gets three tries. It ain't hardly nacheral to hit that ball the first crack. Leastways, nobody ain't done it yet. You jest keep your eye peeled, Pop, and that ball will come out again."

And Pop literally kept his eye peeled.

He had double reasons to pray for success, for his "old woman" had smiled and shook her head when he allowed that he would try out for a place on that posse. All his nerves grew taut and keen. He waited.

Once more the white streak appeared and surely he who threw the ball had every wish to see Pop succeed, for he tossed it high and easily. Again the gun barked from Giersberg's hand, and again the ball dropped almost slowly out of sight.

"It's a trick!" gasped Pop. "It's something damned queer."

"They's a considerable pile of gents that think the same way you do," admitted the deputy sheriff dryly.

Pop glared at him and gritted his teeth.

"Lead the damn thing on agin," he said, and muttered the rest of his sentence to himself. He jerked his hat lower over his eyes, spread his feet a little more, and got ready for the last, desperate chance.

But fate was against Pop. Twenty years before he might have struck that mark if he had been in top condition, but to-day, though he put his very soul into the effort, and though the ball for the third time was lobbed with the utmost gentleness through the air, his bullet banged vainly against the sheet of iron and the white, inoffensive ball continued on its way.

Words came in the throat of Pop, reached his opened mouth, and died there. He thrust the gun back into its holster, and turned slowly toward the crowd. There was no smile to meet his challenging eye, for Pop was a known man, and though he might have failed to strike this elusive mark that was no sign that he would fail to hit something six feet in height by a couple in breadth. When he found that no mockery awaited him, a sheepish smile began at his eyes and wandered dimly to his lips.

"Well, gents," he muttered, "I guess I ain't as young as I was once. S'-long!"

He shouldered his way to the door and was gone.

"That's about all, friends," said the

deputy crisply. "I guess there ain't any more clamorin's for a place to-day?"

He swept the crowd with a complacent eye.

"If you got no objection," murmured a newcomer, who had just slipped into the room, "I'd sort of like to take a shot at that."

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE SIXTH MAN.

IT caused a quick turning of heads.

"I don't want to put you out none," said the applicant gently. His voice was extremely gentle, and there was about him all the shrinking aloofness of the naturally timid. The deputy looked him over with quiet amusement—slender fellow with the gentlest brown eyes—and then with a quick side-glance invited the crowd to get in on the joke.

"You ain't puttin' me out," he assured the other. "Not if you pay for your own ammunition."

"Oh, yes," answered the would-be man-hunter. "I reckon I could afford that."

He was so serious about it that the crowd murmured its amusement instead of bursting into loud laughter. If the man was a fool, at least he was not aggressive in his folly. They gave way and he walked slowly towards the counter and stepped into the little open space beside the master of ceremonies. Very obviously he was ill at ease to find himself the center of so much attention.

"I s'pose you been practisin' up on tin-cans?" suggested the deputy, leaning on the counter.

"Sometimes I hit things and sometimes I don't," answered the stranger.

"Well"—and this was put more crisply as the deputy brought out a large pad of paper—"jest gimme your name, partner."

"Joe Cumber." He grew still more ill at ease. "I hear that even if you hit the mark you got to talk to the sheriff himself afterward?"

"Yep."

The applicant sighed.

"Why d'you ask?"

"I ain't much on words."

"But hell with your gun, eh?" The deputy grinned again, but when the other turned his head toward him his smile went out, suddenly, while the wrinkle of mirth still lay in his cheek. The deputy stroked his chin and looked thoughful.

"Get your gun ready," he ordered.

The other slipped his hand down to his gun-butt and moved his weapon to make sure that it was loose in the leather.

"Ain't you goin' to take your gun out?" queried the deputy.

"Can I do that?"

"I reckon not," said the deputy, and looked the stranger straight in the eyes.

His change to deadly earnestness put a hush over the crowd.

Across the target, not tossed easily as it had been for Pop Giersberg, but literally thrown, darted the line of white, while the gun flipped out of its holster as if it possessed life of its own, and spoke. The white line ended half way to the farther side of the target, and the revolver slid again into hiding.

A clamor of amazement broke from the crowd, but the deputy looked steadily, without enthusiasm, at the stranger.

"Joe Cumber," he said, when the noise fell away a little, "I guess you'll see the sheriff. Harry, take Joe Cumber up to Pete, will you?"

One of the bystanders jumped at the suggestion and led the other from the room, with a full half of the crowd following. The deputy remained behind, thoughtful.

"What's the matter?" asked a spectator. "You look like you'd seen a ghost."

"Gents," answered the deputy, "do any of you recollect seein' this feller before?"

They did not.

"They's something queer about him," muttered the deputy.

"He may be word-shy," proffered a wit, "but he sure aint gun-shy!"

"When he looked at me," said the deputy, more to himself than to the others, "it seemed to me like they was a swirl of yaller come into his eyes. Made me feel like someone had sneaked up behind me with a knife."

In his thoughtfulness his eyes wandered,

and wandering, they fell upon the notice of the reward for the capture, dead or alive, of Daniel Barry, about five feet nine or ten, slender, with black hair and brown eyes.

"My God!" cried the deputy.

But then he relaxed against the counter.

"It ain't possible," he murmured.

"What ain't possible?"

"However, I'm goin' to go and hang around. Gents, I got a crazy idea."

He had no sooner started toward the door than he seemed to gain surety out of the motion.

"It's him!" he cried. He turned toward the others, white of face. "Come on, all of you! It's him! Barry!"

But in the mean time "Harry" had gone on swiftly to the office of the sheriff with "Joe Cumber." Behind him swirled the curious crowd and for their benefit he asked his questions loudly.

"Partner, that was sure a pretty play you made. I've seen 'em all try out to crack them balls, but I never seen none do it the way you did—with your gun in the leather at the start. What part of the country might you be from?"

The other answered gently, "Why, from over yonder."

"The T O outfit, eh?"

"Beyond that."

"Up in the Gray Mountains? That so! I s'pose you been on trails like this before?"

"Nothin' to talk about."

There might have been a double meaning in this remark, and Harry looked twice to make sure that there was no guile.

"Well, here we are." He threw open a door which revealed a baldheaded clerk seated at a desk in a little bare room. "Billy, here's a gent that cracked it the first whack and started his gun from the leather, by God. He—"

"Jest kindly close the door, Harry," said Billy. "Step in, partner. Gimme your name?"

The door closed on the discomfited Harry, and "Joe Cumber" stood close to it, apparently driven to shrinking into the wall in his embarrassment, but while he stood there his hand fumbled behind him and turned the key in the lock, and then extracted it.

"My name's Joe Cumber."

"Joe Cumber"—this while inscribing it.

"Age?"

"About thirty-two, maybe."

"Don't you know?"

"I don't, exactly."

His eyes were as vague as his words, gentle, and smiling.

"Thirty-two?" said Billy sharply. "You look more like twenty-five to me. S'pose we split the difference, eh?"

And with a grin he wrote: "Age twenty-two or three."

"Business?"

"Trapper."

"Good! The sheriff is pretty keen for 'em. You gents in that game got a sort of nose for the trail, mostly. All right, Cumber, you'll see Glass."

He stood at the door.

"By the way, Cumber, is that straight about startin' your shot with your gun in the holster?"

"I s'pose it is."

"You s'pose?" grunted the clerk. "Well come on in?"

He banged once on the door and then threw it open.

"Joe Cumber, Pete. And he drilled the ball startin' his gun out of the leather. Here's his card."

He closed the door, and once more the stranger stood almost cringing against it, and once more his fingers deftly turned the key—softly, silently—and extracted it from the lock.

The sheriff had not looked up from the study of the card, for reading was more difficult to him than man-killing, and Joe Cumber had an opportunity to examine the room. It was hung with a score of pictures. Some large, some small, but most of them enlargements, it was apparent, of kodak snapshots, for the eyes had that bleary look which comes in photographs spread over ten times their intended space. The faces had little more than bleary eyes in common, for there were bearded men, and smooth shaven faces, and lean and fat men; there were round, cherubic countenances, and lean, hungry heads; there were squared, protruding chins, and there were chins which sloped away awkwardly

toward the neck; in fact it seemed that the sheriff had collected twenty specimens to represent every phase of weakness and strength in the human physiognomy.

But beneath the pictures, almost without exception, there hung weapons—rifles, revolvers, knives, placed crisscross in a decorative manner, and it came to "Joe Cumber" that he was looking at the galaxy of the dead who had fallen by the hand of Sheriff Pete Glass. Not a face meant anything to him but he knew, instinctively, that they were the chosen badmen of the past twenty years.

"So you're Joe Cumber?"

The sheriff turned in his swivel chair and tossed his cigarette butt through the window. "What can I do for you?"

"I got an idea, sheriff, that maybe you'd sort of like to have my picture."

The sheriff looked up from his study of the card, and having looked up his eyes remained riveted. The other no longer cringed with embarrassment, but every line of his body breathed a great happiness. He was like one who has been riding joyously, with a sharp wind in his face.

There was a distant rushing of feet, a pounding on the door of the next room.

"What's that?" muttered the sheriff, his attention called away.

"They want me."

"Wait a minute," called the voice of Billy without.

"I'll open the door. By God, it's locked!"

"They want me—five feet nine or ten, slender, black hair and brown eyes—"

"Barry!"

"Glass, I've come for you."

"And I'm ready. And I'll say this"—he was standing, now, and his nervous hands were at his sides—"I been hungerin' and hopin' for this time to come. Barry, before you die, I want to thank you!"

"You've follered me like a skunk," said Barry, "from the time you killed a hoss that had never done no harm to you. You got on my trail when I was livin' peaceable."

There was a tremendous beating on the outer door of the other room, but Barry went on: "You took a gent that was livin' straight and you made a sneak and a crook out of him and sent him to double-cross me. You ain't worth livin'. You've spent your life huntin' men, and now you're at the end of your trail. Think it over. You're ready to kill again, but are you ready to die?"

The little dusty man grew dustier still. His mouth worked. "Damn you," he whispered, and went for his gun.

It was out, his finger on the trigger, the barrel whipping into line, when the weapon in Barry's hand exploded. The sheriff spun on his heel and fell on his face. Three times, as he lay there, dead in all except the instinctive movement of his muscles, his right hand clawed at his empty holster. The sixth man had died for Grey Molly.

The outer door of Billy's room crashed to the floor, and heavy feet thundered nearer. Barry ran to the window and whistled once, very high and thin. It brought a black horse racing around a corner nearby; it brought a wolf-dog from an opposite direction, and as they drew up beneath the window, he slid out and dropped lightly, catlike, to the ground. One leap brought him to the saddle, and Satan stretched out along the street.

**(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)**

## FANCY

FANCY, in full motley clad,
Roams through all seasons, grim or glad;
Fleet as the wind o'er sea and land,
Free-footed as a gipsy band;
To rule or reason disinclined—
A dream-born vagrant of the mind.

*William Hamilton Hayne.*

# The Trap

by

## Raymond S. Spears

A MAN likes to be accommodating when it's reasonable and convenient. Away up and out in the edge of things, the way a trapper is, and all alone most of the time, he sort of grows into the habit of being wise and saying nothing. If there's any place in the world where a man learns to mind his own business, and keep his eyes open, it's along about the lower rim of the timber line, where the red and yellow desert swings down into the basin of what used to be the bed of a lake ten million years ago.

My line, laid out on scientific principles, reaches away up into marten and pekan country, down through the parks of the grazing bears and out into the plateaus and gulches where wolves and coyotes range. For my part, I like variety to living. One spell and I hanker to trap wolves, and then another spell and I set jaws for the confusion and predicament of black bears, or even a panther, which they call cougars out this way.

For nice, ladylike trapping, give me mink and muskrats along a pretty little creek, with aspens and cottonwoods, and maybe lodgepole pines higher up, and beaver and otter occasionally. I'm especially interested in these water weasels and rodents.

I was setting a trap under the old log-pole bridge over Fretful Creek, just below the new government transcontinental trail bridge, when a big, long, two-ton automobile passenger-car came sqeaking down the divide grade and stopped. I rolled my eyes up, and there was just one person in the car.

She was wrapped in furs, and wore a little round fur cap, all martens, and on her little hands were fluffy big fur mitts. Her cheeks were rosy, her eyes were blue, and her chin was prominent, but beautiful. The smile she gave me at about six rods was like a sunburst against the side of the continental range. I didn't have much more to do with the trap, and so I sauntered up to the steel bridge, respectful, and passed the time of day. She sort of indicated that this was her wish.

"It's pretty late in the season to be following this trail," I remarked to her, for any day a blizzard might come along. Water furs were prime, even then.

"Oh, I don't mind!" she smiled. "I can swing down southwest of here, and beat the snow-storms to it!"

It lacked an hour of being noon. She asked some questions about trapping, and showed me her own rifle, which she carried in a saddle-holster beside her. It was a dandy little carbine, and powerful enough to drop an elk at eighty rods, level sights. While I looked at the gun, she looked at me.

"You're a Westerner?" she inquired casually.

"Not exactly," I had to admit, "I was brought up in the Adirondacks, and came out here two, three years ago. My name's Tex Beatty—"

"Yes? The trapper—what a wonderful country you have to range!" And her

gaze went wandering off from peak to slope and into the depths of a hundred miles of valley and plateau, red, yellow, and far-away blue.

"I like it," I admitted, "I'm using one of the government cabins down the valley for a little early spot trapping. You're probably the last tourist that 'll cross through this route."

"There's another party that 'll likely be through in a day or two," she remarked, "I dropped them over the other side the range. I know the Sierras are closed—the northern passes. If necessary, I'll slip out of some station anywhere along the railroads. I want to hunt a little. I just love wandering in the wilderness."

"It sure is fine!" I remarked from experience.

"You're going down to the cabin?"

"I'm just spot trapping a little here; that was my last trap."

"Then jump in, and I'll run you down to your camp!"

Just that way. She came nearer being natural than any lady I ever did happen to meet. I stepped in, and she let the brakes go, so we rolled down the grade, around the brinks of cliffs, along the sliding slopes, and into the yard of the government log-cabin, about two miles away and three thousand feet below.

She shed her fur coats and stood forth as pretty as a picture, smiling and mighty helpful around the government fireplace, where we sat down to make dinner. Naturally, I kind of laid myself out to have a regular meal, venison steaks, broiled, hot bread, and one thing and another. To these she added a good many frills, catsup, and salad dressings, which went well with fried trout, and watercress. She was mighty fond of the wild honey I'd beat the bears to besides, and we sure did have a mighty nice meal.

After dinner, and when she had sized me up pretty well, she went right down to business and said:

"Now, Mr. Beatty, I've seen game tracks all around here; there are deer and bear, and I saw fresh elk or moose tracks up on the mountain. I want to do a few days' shooting. The road west of here can be driven if it's two feet deep with snow, and I can get to the railroad. And what matter if the car is snowed in? It 'd be only a few days' drive on horses—"

She headed off all those arguments I might have made. Then she followed up with statements to the effect that she wanted a guide, and if I would assent to it, she'd be very happy, indeed. What could I say?

Naturally, a lady is about the most inconvenient thing there is around a trapper's shanty, but this was government works, and she knew I couldn't drive her away, if she aimed to stay, and if I wanted to be polite, why all there was to it was truckle down. I did. I wasn't any too cheerful about guiding a lady, but she just laughed at me. She could make the proudest man in the world humble and grateful, laughing at him, I'll bet.

So we fixed things up. She had about a ton of outfit in her automobile. She had tents, for instance, but she wouldn't let me set up one for myself.

"There's two good bunks in the cabin," she said right off the reel. "And I sha'n't sleep out myself, nor run the risk of having to take care of a pneumonia patient by having you out there."

A man can't argue about some things with a lady, so come nightfall we had that bare, plain and ordinary government cabin as scrumptuous with Indian blankets, furs, and female ornaments as could be, and even an electric light on a wire run in from her big storage battery. She'd drained the radiator, and settled down to stay a while.

Guiding for anybody never was much in my line. I don't expect to feel more awkward or interested in my life. But she accepted my ignorance as a matter of course, and amused herself with a long and stirring series of my wilderness experience and trap line stories during the evening, and when I carried in some large chunks for the fireplace she crawled into her boudoir on the west side of the cabin.

I'm an early riser myself, and she beat me to it by a minute, appearing by the fireplace, stirring up the coals, and we made breakfast before the light of day, and went up the mountain into a sort of a park to the north, looking for game.

She carried that rifle of hers with care and skill. I didn't notice the muzzle pointing at me more than once or twice all that morning, which indicated considerable previous experience. And when about ten thirty o'clock we rounded a point, and jumped a little herd of blacktails, she lifted her little carbine and filled the echoes with thunder. She hit that buck four times out of six, and my respect for her increased, if that could be possible.

It was only about two miles from camp, so when I'd dressed the game, we went back there, took my pack horse, and jogged up to the kill to bring it down. This was hunting enough for one day, and she wrote two or three letters on a hand typewriter, which a native would mail for her—and she rode my horse down in the afternoon to the ranch, coming back that same night after supper. She could have stayed down there just as well as not, but she didn't, and so rambled in around ten o'clock, just when I'd settled down to be comfortable.

I bet she talked for two hours that night. It was mighty entertaining, but it kept me awake. She was also mighty persuasive. Game laws are pretty strict out here as regards some kinds of game. The people and politicians have awakened to the fact that elk, moose, and mountain sheep add a heap to the glory of the shrinking wilderness, and even beaver and some of those small creatures are being protected here and there. I agree with the general public, even if I am a trapper. I don't aim to kill any more meat than I can use, and if I'm not as useful as some folks, at least I'm honorable and don't take what doesn't belong to me.

Now this lady, who said her name was Agnes Mayova Leandole, seemed somehow to be intolerable toward the living things. That deer she'd killed gave us lots of meat, but nothing would do, now, but she must kill a mountain sheep.

"It is my sporting ambition," she said, "to shoot one of those beautiful mountain rams, and have its head mounted and its hide preserved."

"Why—er—you know—" I sort of began.

"Oh, now, Tex Beatty!" she laughed at me. "Do you mean to say you haven't any sporting blood? Don't you *dast* to violate the game law?"

Now what's a man going to do when a woman taunts him like that? At the same time, I couldn't feel very frisky about it. I am sort of a stranger in these parts. It doesn't seem right for outsiders to come into a State, violating the game laws, killing animals that belong to the whole people. Of course, I am kind of particular that way for a trapper, but at the same time, I don't see any use of being a game thief, any more than being a chicken thief, or stealing some individual's pigs.

She knew what was aching me, too. She laughed at me, and she didn't have any mercy on me at all. She called me about all the soft and exasperating names she could lay tongue to, and all I could do was sit and grow red, and feel doubtful and pleased, the way a man has to be. She knew I had a conscience and that it was bothering me, and so she set out to bother me more.

The snow wasn't deep on the higher ranges yet. It had, however, begun to drive the wild life down, and I had already seen two small flocks of the mountain sheep a few miles south of us. Nothing would do but we must go look for them. That meant a night or two out, so I made up a camping outfit, put it on my packhorse, and we started.

We stopped that night on a nice level bench, with a lot of green timber all around us. A sifting of snow showed tracks, and here was a fine game pocket—deer, bear, and just before dark, the trail of a band of sheep. I was in hopes we'd not find any, but she knew those tracks. She took charge, then, and we camped where she said.

We broiled our meat, and drank our coffee black. She had a pneumatic sleeping-bag, and I had a cowboy's canvas and two army blankets. I pumped her mattress up with a big tire pump, too. I did what she said. What else could I do?

The next morning while the stars were still shining bright, she popped out of bed, and had the fire started before I was awake. She fried some venison, and we had break-

fast. Then, with her rucksack and my game-bag full of lunch, we went hunting among the peaks. I hadn't wasted much time hunting around the precipices. Now I had my fill of it.

We sneaked in our gray suits to look into gulches and valleys a mile deep; we studied the landscape through our binoculars; we saw bear, which she sniffed at; we saw a twenty-dollar fisher, which she wouldn't let me shoot; we crossed the trail of a legal elk, a buster, and she gave less than half a glance at it. Nothing would suit her mind but a mountain sheep!

Mountain sheep, with a two hundred fine on it, and the glory of the high peaks in its spring and bound, the scorn of safety and the fire of courage in its great eyes; She just set her pretty lips, and squinted her keen and commanding eyes—so I tagged along after her, and held the rope, when we skirted along the brinks of doom, and the rims of wilderness paradise.

To see a lady like that so bloodthirsty sort of shocked me. Yet sometimes I could see in her face something else. She would pause on a shoulder to gaze away off down into the pink and yellow deserts, the valleys of the arid lands a hundred miles away in the hollows.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she would whisper to herself, and then she'd turn and ask me, "Did you ever see anything like it in your life?"

It was at such times I'd see tears filling her eyes. She splashed them out angrily, though. I know she wanted somebody who could just love that sort of scenery. She talked like a book. She asked me if I had ever heard of Ruskin, Thoreau, Seton, and so on. She couldn't see enough of the high places, and luck was with her.

We were walking along a slope where the trees are six inches high, and like a mat on the ground, when nine sheep came bounding down out of the mountain and stopped short, caught by surprise, not forty yards away. Usually, in such cases, the biggest and best head of all is around behind all the ewes or lambs, but not this time. The ram was nearest; he stood the highest, and I could see his chest wide and flat like that of a horse.

For a second she was frozen by her good fortune. Then I saw her rifle slip up and the top of her cap lean forward—she was ahead of me. Then she pulled. The flock scattered, but the big ram just walked a few steps, and she put her eye into the sights again, fired, and her victim collapsed.

Better than two hundred and seventy-five pounds, with horns that more than made a circle, she had a trophy that must forever be her pride, and her shame, too. Yet she turned and with a snapshot, broke the back of a three-year-old at a hundred yards.

"Now, we've each a head!" she turned and said to me.

I thought she would be laughing and proud. She wasn't. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. Yet she was grim, and we dressed those victims, brought the pack-horse to the foot of the steep, and dragged the meat to it. We were back at the government cabin the next morning, and the heads were with the meat out in the green timber, hidden. That was my idea, and she didn't seem to object.

The next day I had my traps to look after, and so I made the round, about ten miles—a short loop spot-trapping line. I took up some nice little fur, and was back in the cabin about three o'clock. There she was, with both those sheep heads, working over them like a taxidermist. I nearly had heart failure—but she just laughed.

"Why, nobody will come!" she said. "What are you frightened of? The idea of a trapper being afraid of violating the game law!"

She laughed and made merry over it. She was a gale of fun that day.

"Now I've done what I came to do!" she said, and she stepped over the cabin floor like a dancer on the stage.

She took killing those sheep mighty easy! Yet, sometimes she would draw back and close her fist as she looked at the green skins and the heads. She was sorry, too, as well as satisfied. I tried to have her hide them out, but she wouldn't. When I came in from the line there was a great roast of mutton spitted before the fireplace, turning around and around, broiling. I never ate better meat.

Every once in a while she looked off down the trail toward the valley of the deserts. I thought she was wondering if any one would happen along. Somebody did, all right. An hour after dark, I heard horses coming, and grabbed up the two heads, and the hides, to run. She stopped me.

"Fool!" she said. "Wait!"

What can a man do? I waited. Just as I expected, in walked three men, a forest ranger, a game warden, and another fellow, sort of a sport, I took him to be. The first thing they saw were the mountain sheep relics. They looked at one another. They looked at me, wild-eyed as I was, and then at the woman.

She was looking at the fire, turning her wedding-ring and diamonds around and around with her fingers. She was white.

"Well, we've got you!" the game warden said.

"Yes, sir," I replied. "You have me. I'm a trapper, and I'm a hunter. She's a tourist—just came through."

"He lies!" she turned. "I shot one of those sheep—the big one."

"You confess to that, too?" the sport asked.

"I don't deny anything a woman says," I grumbled.

"How long have you been here?"

"A week or so," she spoke up. "We're old—old friends."

In the morning four of us went down in her car. It was about sixty miles to town, and the county seat. There was a lot of rigamarole to the business. They had us arrested on a warrant, one warrant for the two of us, and then they tried us together. We had a lawyer, and he made sort of a fuss, but there wasn't any escaping it.

We were fined two hundred dollars each and costs, which they made quite considerable. I thought my reputation was spoiled, and that now I'd have game wardens camping on my tracks all the while; not that I cared, but just that I was mixed up in a lady's violating. I cussed myself, inside a lot, for letting the woman be such a fool, and, naturally, I paid my own fine. I was going to pay hers, too. The look she gave me was wonderful!

Everybody around just beamed on me, the lawyers, and the judge, and the reporters. Then after the case was all settled and adjourned, she went out with me, into her car, and while they took our photographs, she turned her machine around, and we smoked back up into the mountains.

"Tex," she turned to me, "I've known you were one of the noblemen of the wilderness. You let me lead you into all this—all this violating, and you—you would have paid the price. You did pay your own fine—and I'm to blame. You offered to pay mine, too—I—I just couldn't let you."

"It would have been a favor to me," I answered, though I suppose two hundred and twenty-four dollars and thirty cents means as much to me as to anybody on top of the same amount.

"I believe you!" She shook her head. "Oh, I'm ashamed! I'm ashamed—taking advantage of your—your gallantry! You didn't want me to camp there—you didn't want me to kill illegal game—and you would have let me go free, when I—I had led you into it! How does it happen you never married?"

Just like that! It took me all of a heap. When you've guided a lady through the Western ranges of the Rockies, and when you've been arrested with her, and fined for violating the game laws, and you've heard her laugh, and seen her cry, you find her a heap more unexpected than even in the beginning. There wasn't much to tell.

"The other fellow took her," I said.

"Tex!" She turned to me. "She was a fool! And you'll hate women more now—I know you will!"

"No." I shook my head. "You don't hate the mountains, or deserts, or blizzards or—or women."

I felt pretty brash, talking so free and easy to a woman. I thought she would sort of be angry. She wasn't, though. She just sniffed and sobbed a little, crying as she took that roadway at thirty miles an hour!

She drove me home. After supper she settled with me. I didn't want to take a cent. Somehow, it didn't seem right. She was a friend. She had given me something to remember all my life. What I have

missed, not having a wife, nor a sweetheart, is my own starvation. She put down the money for the fines, for my time—and the biggest scale I ever heard of, a tip. I fought against taking it, any of it, especially that extra.

But nobody can stand up against a woman like that. She was sorry for me, seeming to understand my feelings about being caught violating. She was, for her part, right well satisfied. Some people are that way—they like to be thought pretty bad, like a bully, or a smart Aleck. Only in her case, she was just lovely; that's the only way I can say it.

Tears rolled down her cheeks when she had killed those noble brutes of the high peaks! Only a strong and courageous woman could have won her way to that barren above the timber line. A woman, but probably no more complicated than lots of others of her sex, she rolled away down the mountain and left a mighty big sky overhead, and nothing much under it, for a long time after she was gone.

She left me a lot of things, an Indian blanket eight foot square and about half an inch thick, for one thing, and her rifle, with a lot of ammunition, and four or five books by those men she asked if I'd ever read anything they wrote; some cooking utensils and a vacuum bottle—about two horse-back loads all together. If only I'd had the education, and the manners, and a lot of those frills a man needs, when such a stranger comes into his world!

"But she's married!" I kept telling myself, having seen her wedding-ring, and how she twisted it around, with the diamond rings, sitting in the light of the flames before the fireplace at night.

"I'm, oh, a thousand times more grateful and obliged to you than you'll ever know—you dear old stupid trapper!" she laughed at me, with a choke in her voice that I'll never forget—the words, or the choke, or the fluttering tears in her eyes.

This seemed to be all there was to it. Winter was coming on, so I took up my spot trapping line, and edged off across into my winter trapping country, south and southwest of the Pozums.

About six weeks afterward I had quite a surprise in the mail. It was a long, legal-looking letter, and the more I looked into it the legaler its contents became.

In a pink rubber-stamp on the first page was the statement:

**SERVICE BY MAIL**

Then along down for about two and a half square feet was a statement, to wit, that Tex Beatty was hereby served with a summons to appear, and be responsible for whatever, if he didn't, to be corespondent in the hereinafter described "suit for absolute divorce" in the case of

**Thomas Tupelo Leandole**

*versus*

**Agnes Mayova Leandole**

Just like that! Gee, Christmas Hackensack! Then, in a nice pale-blue envelope, pages of pale-blue letter paper, written on first one side, then another, and sidewise across the back, and so on, about four square feet of apology and beseeching. It was from the lady. I could see her writing that letter just as plain as though I had stood there, sort of laughing, sort of with tears in her eyes, awful sorry, but mighty well satisfied, too, the way she had been while we hunted down the mountain sheep—and she had just had to have mountain sheep! They were illegal and from a newspaper clipping that she enclosed, I sort of understood the gist of it:

> It appears from affidavits submitted in the case by the plaintiff that Mrs. Leandole is accused of having spent a considerable time hunting with a well-known sportsman, Mr. Tex Beatty, on the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains. The plaintiff learned of the affair through the arrest of Mr. Beatty and Mrs. Leandole in a government cabin to which they had carried two beautiful mountain sheep heads, with the hides, the killing of these animals being against the law; the report of the arrest and the fining of the two, as printed in the newspapers, enabled Mr. Leandole to bring the divorce suit on statutory grounds.

Naturally I was for pulling up stakes and going back to New York. I could have told them something they didn't know. But her letter, same as usual, was right the other way.

"Please don't do anything about it," she wrote. "I know what you want to do. Just don't say a word. You will do this for me, I am sure. Just as it nearly broke my heart to murder those great, beautiful mountain sheep, as they stood there so proudly against their own homeland, so I do feel what an outrageous trick I have played on you. I am sorry! Oh, believe that I am! But they knew, down there in the little mountain court town, that you were honorable. They just hated to have you stained with the reputation of being a law violator—but I just had to do it! And I have put that other stain on you, too, but you know. A clean man is so splendid —and he—you will not deny me this favor? You know, I cried, sacrificing those sheep—and now, my heart is sore for you. Please, Tex—say nothing, and have my eternal gratitude! I know you will for me."

What else could a man do?

## FIRST THOUGHTS ON OLD AGE

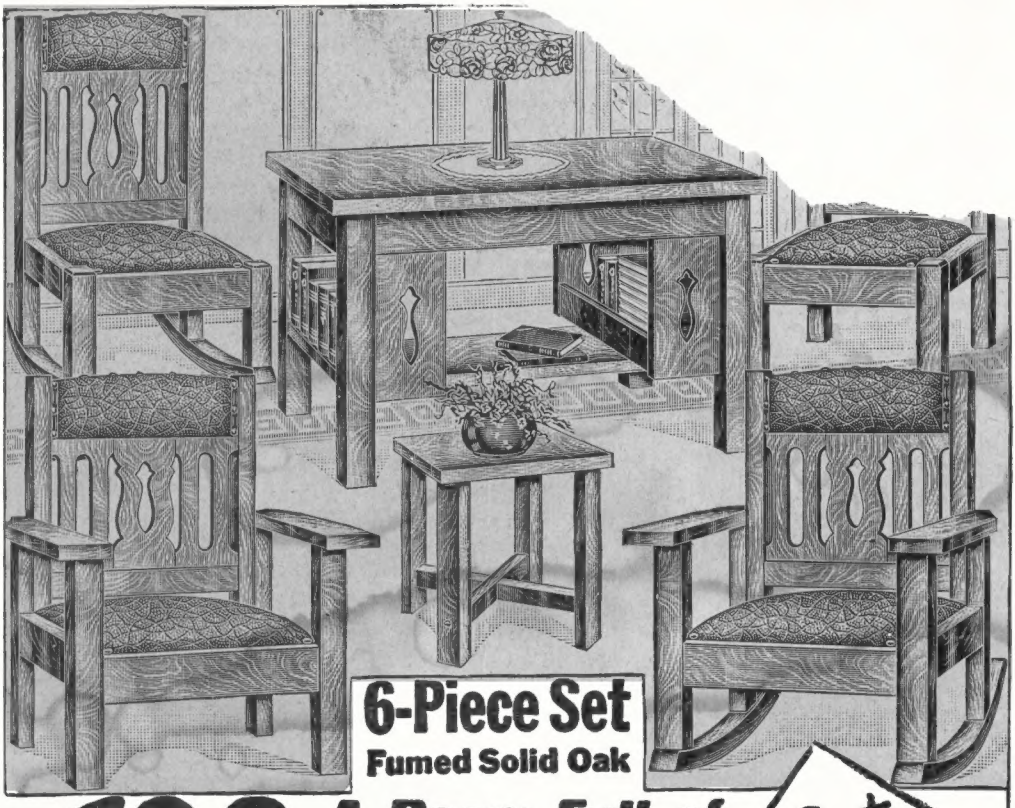
IN my heart and end of dreaming,
And all hero-worship done?
To the forest glades of Sherwood
I no more delight to run?
When no more I ride with Arthur,
Follow Cœur de Lion bold,
Youth will then be on the waning,
And I'll think I'm growing old.

By the smiling of a maiden
Is my heart not moved at all?
And the old romantic spirit
Holds my mind not more in thrall.
When I build no fairy castles
In the air, nor see the gold
At the end of every rainbow
I'll believe I'm growing old.

There's no magic in the flowers,
And no luster of the May?
There's no call to shoulder knapsack
And to wander far away?
When the brooklet's sweetest music
Uninviting seems and cold,
And I only read my paper,
Then I'll feel I'm growing old.

Birds a singing in the willows
When the blue is in the sky,
And that streak of humming purple
Is a darting dragon-fly;
When my hook is left unbaited,
And my spoon is never trolled—
When I go no more a fishing,
Then I know I'm growing old!

*Frederick A. Earle.*



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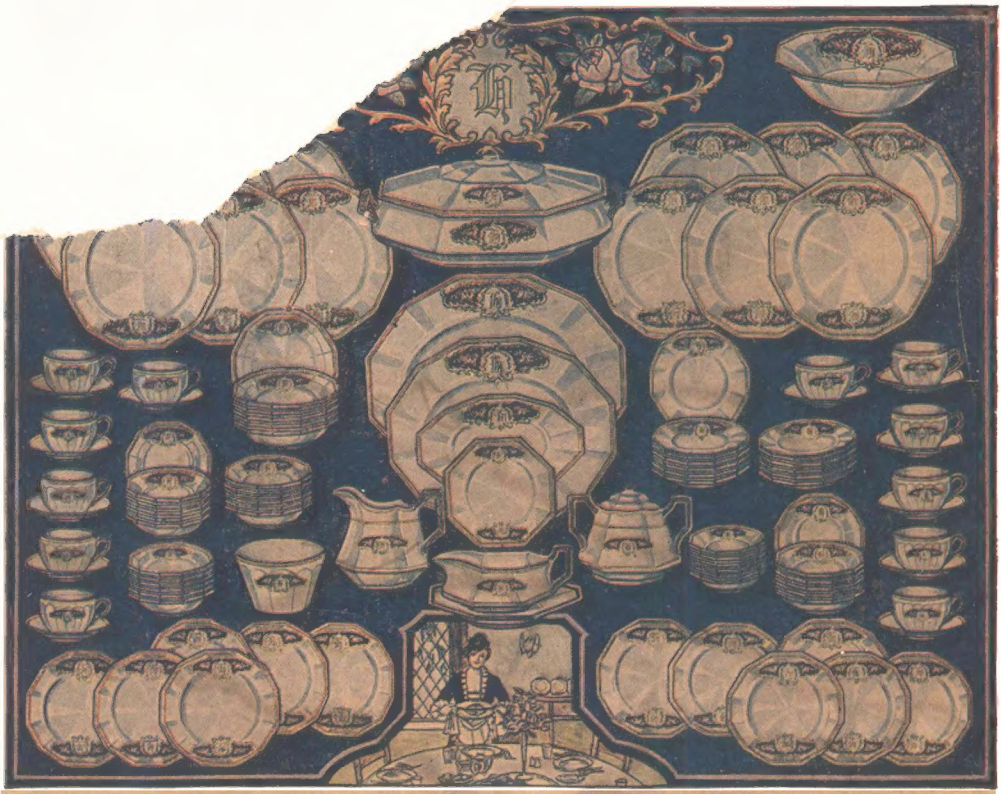

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12 Saucers
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12 Cereal Dishes, 6 inches
12 Fruit Dishes, 5¼ inches
12 Individual Bread and Butter Plates, 6¼ inches
1 Platter, 13⅜ inches
1 Platter, 11⅝ inches
1 Celery Dish, 8¾ inches
1 Sauce Boat Tray, 7¾ inches
1 Butter Plate, 6 inches
1 Vegetable Dish, 10⅛ inches, with lid (2 pieces)
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